ESSAYS

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Dallas Burdette

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Essays

Volume 1

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About This Collection

This volume contains essays written by Dr. Dallas Burdette of Montgomery, Alabama, during the last decade of the 20th century and into the early 21st. They were published for a number of years on his website, Freedom in Christ, before being archived on Archive.org. They have been combined here into a single volume for ease of distribution.

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B. D. Lewis
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Christian Living: Its Motive

Thrust Statement: **Many Christians suffer from an undernourishment of the soul.**

Scripture Reading: **Colossians 3:16-17**

The expression *word of God* in **Colossians 3:16** is somewhat nebulous without a context. This phrase is generally associated with the written Revelation of God, not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just a cursory reading of the entire Epistle seems to convey the concept that the Gospel is equivalent to the "word of Christ" (**Colossians 3:16**). Every Christian is to allow the Good News of God's way of salvation in and through Jesus to dwell in him or her richly. This consciousness of God's grace will enable one to live a much greater life of purity and holiness before God. A comprehension of the Gospel is the motive for living a life that honors God. Having said this, one cannot and must not discount that God's Holy Word, the Bible, which should also dwell in the hearts of His people.

Since God inspired the sixty-six books of the Bible, Christians should meditate upon this written Revelation day and night. The printed Revelation of God is very rich in its spiritual treasures to assist His people in their spiritual journey. It is for this reason that Paul, no doubt, writes: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (**Colossians 4:16**). Several hundred years earlier, one of the psalmists wrote about the enjoyment of Scripture by one who serves the Lord God: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (**Psalm 1:2**). In Paul's farewell address to Timothy, he writes:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15] and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (**2 Timothy 3:14-17**). [1]

Is your delight in God's Word? Do you study Holy Scripture? How often do you reflect upon the Word inspired by God? People today are suffering from malnutrition in God's written Word as well as the Gospel because of other interests—movies, television, novels, football, baseball, hunting, fishing, and so on. There is nothing wrong, in and of itself, with these activities, but when Christians allow these things to interfere with their interest in the things of God, there should be a reexamination of one's priorities. Many Christians do not take time to read, to study, and to memorize Holy Scripture.

It is through the written Revelation of God that one comes to understand something of God's grace in and through His Son Jesus. It is this grace that Paul stresses in the **Book of Colossians**. Even though the written Word is important, the focus of this message is centered on the "word of Christ" as equivalent to God's redemption in and through Christ. Do you appreciate God's act in Christ that gives you a new standing before God? Are you conscious that the Good News is about God's love to sinful and rebellious humanity in spite of what they are? Are you aware that it is at the Cross of Christ that God meets sinful humanity?

In the crucifixion on Golgotha, one witnesses God's act of redemption and His revelation of His mystery. God's act in Christ gives every person who puts his or her trust in Him a new standing. This is the "mystery" that Paul speaks of as the Gospel, or "word of Christ." The word *redemption* in **verse 14** of **chapter 1** explains a change in the condition of any man or woman who responds to Jesus through faith. This change brought about by Jesus can only be apprehended through faith. This is the Good News that Paul wishes for the Colossians to allow to dwell in them richly. It is at the point of the Cross that God meets Dallas Burdette. It is at the point of the Cross that God meets you.

Before embarking upon Christian living, this essay zeros in on the motive behind the demands for ethical behavior that glorifies God. If one wishes to understand the full import of the phrase "word of Christ" in **Colossians 3:16**, one must begin with the first chapter of this magnificent Book about God's mystery hidden from ages past (**1:26**). Paul commends the Colossians for their faith in the Lord Jesus (**1:4**). He then speaks of the "word of truth, the gospel" (**1:5**). This gospel is bearing fruit in their lives (**1:6**). This gospel is then called "God's grace in all its truth" (**1:6**). He then reveals his habit of praying that God would fill them with the knowledge of His will, and he also prays that they will live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way by bearing fruit in every good work and growing in knowledge of God (**1:9-10**). One cannot have Christian morality without having Christian faith. Christian morality in the world is as a result of the Christian religion. Many in the world do not realize that morality is not inherent in man; it is due to the Christian religion.

Following this exhortation, Paul sets forth the supremacy of Christ (**1:15-23**). Toward the close of this section, he once again discusses the Gospel: "If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant" (**1:23**). Hope is held out in the Gospel. This Gospel is the "word of Christ" that Paul declares in his statement: "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly" (**3:16**). This "word of Christ," as stated above,

is also the "mystery" unfolded in the **Book of Colossians**. Listen once more to Paul as he seeks to unfold this "word of Christ" to the Colossians:

> I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (**1:25-29**).

Just as the "glorious riches of this mystery" are to be taught to everyone with all wisdom (**1:28**), so also the "mystery" should be echoed through the singing of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (**3:16**), whether privately or corporately. This "mystery" that is to dwell in them richly is none other than "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (**1:27**). Paul's purpose in writing this Epistle was in order that they might understand the "full riches" of God's act in Jesus Christ. Again, he goes right to the kernel of his objective in writing this short Epistle:

> I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. [5] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is (**2:1-5**).

If one allows Christ to dwell in one's life, the works of the flesh will not bear fruit. In **Chapter 3 of Colossians**, Paul enumerates rules for holy living (**vv. 1-14**). Following this admonition, he once more calls attention to this "mystery," which is the equivalent of the "word of Christ."

> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (**3:15-17**).

As Paul concludes this Book, he encourages the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for his message:

> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. [3] And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the

mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. [4] Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should (**4:2-4**).

Have you read this Epistle in order to understand something of this mystery that had been hidden from ages past? Is it important to read? Paul wanted the church to understand something about the richness of God's grace in and through Jesus Christ. This understanding of Grace should bring about a change in one's lifestyle. He writes: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (**4:16**). If Christians are to be strong in the Lord, one must let his or her day begin and end with this "word of Christ" flooding his or her soul. Many Christians still suffer from an acute undernourishment of this spiritual truth about the coming of Christ as the turning point in man and woman's history. In Colossians, Paul accentuates this historical factuality of the Cross of Christ (**1:20**).

Has a consciousness of God's act of love brought about a change in your attitude toward God and toward one another and toward your ethical behavior? As one reflects upon **Colossians 3:16-17**, one wonders if there really is a difference in one's Christian ethical behavior from the ethical behavior of the world. Is there a difference in your love concerning others? These two verses go right to the heart of the life of a Christian—the Gospel of Christ is the answer to the ethical behavior of both men and women. Paul sums up the life that is supposed to be characteristic of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. How can one put off the former way of Life (**3:1-9**) and put on the new man (**3:10-14**)? Paul's answer is found in **3:15-17**.

Is there anything special about your Christian life? Are you poles apart from those who do not believe in Jesus? Is your churchgoing the only thing that distinguishes you from the world at large? Is it just your religious beliefs that distinguish you from those who do not believe in Jesus? Are you any better off as a result of your belief in Jesus Christ? What does your Christian profession amount to? Does your discipleship result in something distinctive? Has your faith in Jesus and God resulted in changed behavior? If an awareness of Jesus' atonement upon the Cross dwells in you richly, this consciousness will change your devotion from one of lukewarmness to a hot flame of fire. If the flame is flickering in your life, this realization of the vicarious sufferings of Christ upon the Tree will redirect your interest.

Has the church of Christ, or the body of Christ, had an impact upon your way of life? Each believer should examine his or her life to see if the church of Jesus has produced positive results. Has the Sunday morning assembly changed your external and internal behavior? Has the teaching of the Word or the preaching of the Gospel altered your ethical behavior? Has your giving to support the advancement of God's kingdom on earth changed your reaction to the things of God? Has your daily reading of God's written Word (sixty-six books) refashioned your life? What is the true value of the above activities in your daily walk with God? What is the use of going to the assembly, reading the Bible, giving financially, and so on, if none of these activities produce no constructive results in your walk with God. Without Christianity, would your life be different? Paul lays down principles of Christian living in **Colossians**

3:16-17. In these two verses, Paul enumerates some notes about Christian conduct. Listen to Paul as he sets forth these principles:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.[2]

Paul strips away all extraneous matter and goes right to the very heart of devotion to Christ and to God the Father. Paul launches his instructions for Christian living with the main point: "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly." As noted above, the "word of Christ," so it seems to me, is the same as the Gospel of Christ. How do you interpret these words? This admonition is something that Paul encourages the Colossians to do. One can choose to let the Gospel of Christ dwell in him or her life richly, or one can refuse to let the Good News of God's Way of salvation flood his or her every thought.

The Bible is a history of God's redemption in and through Christ. If one is to understand more clearly the Good News of God, one should read the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament. The New Testament books unfold what had been hidden from ages past with reference to the time of the coming of the Messiah. How often do you read God's Word in order to understand what God's grace is all about? How often do you study God's written Word? Is the Holy Bible a strange book to you? Are the sixty-six books of the Bible your home?

If one wishes to live a better life, this can only be accomplished through a comprehension of God's act of redemption in and through His Son Jesus. If one wishes to glorify God, one must let the Gospel of Christ cloak his or her life, which Gospel is revealed through the written Word of God. If one wishes to be light and salt to the world, one must meditate upon the Word of God (sixty-six books) both day and night. Many believers show more interest in entertainment than they do in the Bible. Many saved people cannot honestly say that the written Word of God dwells totally in their hearts. Both the written Revelation of God and the Gospel of Christ should deeply occupy the hearts of men and women. Many saved people cannot honestly say that the Gospel of Christ takes up its home in their hearts. Is the written Word of God at home in your heart? Is the Gospel of Christ at home in your heart?

If one wishes to live a Christina life, one cannot do this apart from the written Word of God or the Gospel of Christ. When one thinks that he or she can live a righteous life apart from God, one only fools himself or herself. It is not uncommon for individuals to base their salvation on their own works. The work of Christ means nothing. Sin is something that, in one sense, ceases to exist. The root of all problems in the world is associated with sin. Thus, one cannot, in his or her own powers, lift oneself up, only the Gospel of God can do this. This fact alone should cause men and women to let the "word of God," or the Good News, dwell in them richly. Men and women cannot make themselves new; it is only God who can do that, and God does this through the Gospel, the "word of God." God in and through His Son helps men

and women to accomplish what they cannot accomplish on their own—a righteous standing before God. It is God's actions that make all things new.

The twenty-seven books called the New Testament reveals God's actions in and through His Son. God redeems all who have gone astray through Jesus. It is through Jesus that one finds salvation. It is through Jesus that Heaven's doors are opened. One can say that the "word of God" in **Colossians 3:16** is the Gospel. In this Gospel, one discovers forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. It is the Gospel that restores the broken link between God and humanity. It is the word about Jesus, that is to say, the Gospel that brings about healing between God and humanity. The word of Jesus is about forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, which God brought about through the living and dying of Christ upon the Cross as well as His resurrection. Does the Cross of Jesus dwell in you richly?

Again, one must ask, what does Paul mean by "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly"? Does this simply mean to go to church on Sunday? Surely this activity is as a result of one's understanding of His death upon the Cross. If individuals do not meet with God's people, the "word of Christ" becomes alien to them. As stated above, this phrase means much more than just meeting with the saints on Sunday morning. It appears, so it seems to me, that Christians must begin and end each day with this Word, so as to be embraced by it. It is a consciousness of God's gift of love—His Son—that teaches individuals to live holy lives. Many Christians today suffer from famine about what the Gospel of Christ really means. Countless Christians are good for nothing because the Gospel does not dwell in them richly.

The one thing that will change behavior is Jesus. When the Gospel of Christ does not saturate one's life, is it any wonder that Christians do not produce fruit to God's glory? Only Jesus can restore and renew men and women. Do you have a drug problem? If so, Jesus is the answer. Do you have an alcoholic problem? If so, Jesus is the answer. Do you hate other people? If so, Jesus is the answer. Do you have an ongoing illicit relationship of sexual activity? If so, Jesus is the answer. How does one spell Gospel? The answer is: JESUS. The New Testament reveals the Gospel of Christ. The twenty-seven books are like a spring from which one must repeatedly drink if one's life is to be whole and well. When one fails to feast upon the written Revelation of God, one suffers from famine. It is in this vein that Peter writes:

> Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. [2] Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, [3] now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (**1 Peter 2:1-2**).

When one fails to "crave pure spiritual milk," one suffers from an acute undernourishment. Are you loveless in your relationship with other Christians? If so, one wonders if you are constantly replenishing your stores of love at the inexhaustible fountain of God's love. Are you constantly drinking from that eternal spring called Jesus Christ? Are you really allowing the "word of Christ" to dwell in you richly? Are you just playing Christianity? Are you guilty of laziness? The words of Paul are appropriate in order to drive home a certain principle of going all out: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap

generously" (**2 Corinthians 9:6**). Even though Paul is discussing monetary giving, nevertheless, the principle could also apply to love.

Unless one is willing to fertilize his or her field of love, one will not produce the fruit of love. One must constantly nurture or plough the field of the Gospel for one to bear fruit. Are you reaching out to others? Again, Paul goes right to the point of responsibility concerning the teaching of this "word of Christ" to others: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (**Colossians 3:16**). By far and large, this activity does not exist among many believers. Christians are to minister to one another in faith and love. This failure is one of the chief reasons that so much division exists within the body of Christ. This failure to "teach and admonish one another" is one of the chief reasons for its lack of progress in reaching out to the lost or maintaining unity within this fellowship of the redeemed society with its outreach ministry.

Unfortunately, this text is wrenched from its context and made to apply to the Sunday morning gatherings. The early church was not simply a mere Sunday congregation. This tradition is one of the major weaknesses of present-day Christianity. It is not uncommon for many in today's church to labor under the impression that Christianity is gathering for one hour a week for a so-called worship service with certain rituals to be performed in a prescribed manner. But **Colossians 3:16** is more than just Sunday gatherings, listening to a sermon, praying, singing accapella songs, and then going home again until the following Sunday.

The early church was a real brotherhood of both men and women in which the members lived their lives in fellowship with other believers, not in solitary individualism.

> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. [43] Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. [44] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [45] Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. [46] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (**Acts 2:42-47**).

Within the Christian fellowship, Christians are to share with each other their riches of experience in Christ Jesus. Christians are to constantly remind each other of what God accomplished in Christ—the past is buried under the Cross. Christians need to remind each other that at the Cross of Jesus one sees his or her own guilt. With the coming of Jesus, one discovers that Jesus put an end to the solitariness of the individual's religious experience. Salvation is something that we now share with others. Again, the words of Paul explains the responsibilities of each member in this new community: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (**Colossians 3:16**). It is in and through God's new creation that one replenishes his or her stores of love. Emil Bruner correctly says, "Christians did not live in isolation from each other but in fellowship with each other."[3]

Christians are not to build, or erect, walls of hostility within the community of the redeemed. Jesus came to break downs the barriers that separated Jew from Gentile (**Ephesians 2:11-22**). The church is to be a true brotherhood of believers. God's chosen ones are not to live in isolation from other believers but in fellowship with one another. Without the social element, the Christian life becomes underdeveloped and famished. It is only within the fellowship of the emancipated that one becomes enthusiastic and resourceful for the things of God. This fellowship is to ring with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. It is through music that one echoes the "word of God." As one reflects upon God's act of salvation through singing, one must do this "with gratitude" in his or her heart (**Colossians 3:16**). As just stated, Christians are not to live in isolation from each other, but they are to "teach and admonish one another" (**3:16**) through preaching and singing.

Through music, God's Gospel rings out within one's heart. When one makes this kind of music listed in **Colossians 3:16**, one echoes the voice about the "word of God." People still talk about attending a gospel singing. This activity is important in the lives of God's people; otherwise, one remains imprisoned in his or her own world. This God consciousness helps to reshape one's life from day to day. When one sings psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, this helps to transform one's ways of life and, at the same time, to allow what God has spoken and done through His Son Jesus to penetrate one's soul. When one engages in singing, one echoes from the heart what God has already accomplished in and through His Son. This kind of praise lifts one from self-centeredness to God, that is, one is no longer preoccupied with his or her own thoughts, but rather one reflects upon the will and goodness of God. This activity causes one to reflect upon God's grace, not upon one's actions.

Paul does not stop with singing, but he goes on to say that every facet of life is to brought under the umbrella of God: " And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (**Colossians 3:17**). Christians must live their lives in such a way that it does not just revolve around themselves, but rather they are to live their lives as those who belong to Jesus. Christians can no longer have their own way, but they must follow the way of Christ. This new life is a life of thanksgiving to God through Christ. Everyone who has accepted Jesus is a child of God, thus one must not stop this flow of thanksgiving in song and in word and in deed. The believer belongs to God; he is in partnership with God. In Jesus, one is no longer an alien but he or she belongs to God. For one to live in faith is for one to live in a sprit of thankfulness. This spirit of thankfulness constantly calls to mind the words of Paul concerning God's mystery:

> I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (**Colossians 1:25-29**).

CONCLUSION

The **Book of Colossians** unfolds the "mystery" that has been hidden from ages past. This mystery is defined as the "word of truth, the gospel." It is the gospel that

demands ethical behavior on the part of every believer. The Gospel is about redemption and forgiveness of sins. Redemption and forgiveness are realities because of His lifeblood shed upon the Cross. Since Christians belong to God, one ought to clothe himself or herself with characteristics that belong to Christ:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [13] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [14] And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (**Colossians 3:12-14**).

The spirit of gratitude should motivate the life of every believer. One way to prevent gratitude from melting away is to reflect upon God's grace through the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This thankfulness for God's salvation will not vanish as long as one's mind is preoccupied with the "word of Christ." This short Epistle is a challenge to all to devote their lives to Him and to one another. As one works for the cause of Christ, one should not forget Paul's final admonition: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, [24] since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (**3:23-24**). Christians should begin and end each day with thankfulness. The words of Paul in **3:15-17** should ring loud and clear as one contemplates upon God's grace:

> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), unless stated otherwise..

[2] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), unless stated otherwise.

[3] Emil Brunner, *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons*, translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 101. I am indebted to his sermon "The Notes of Christian Living" (pp. 97-104) for the organization of my thoughts for this message. I highly recommend this book for reading.

All Spiritual Blessings --In-- Christ Jesus

Dr. Dallas Burdette **September 25, 1999**

Thrust statement: **One experiences all spiritual blessings in Christ.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:1-3.**

Paul begins this epistle by speaking of the Ephesians as "in Christ Jesus"—"the faithful in Christ Jesus." Paul was a Christ-intoxicated man. Paul could not leave Christ out; he is always talking about Him. In the very next verse, he writes: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**Ephesians 1:2**).[1] Again, he brings home the point that all spiritual blessings come to those in Christ: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (**1:3**). The phrase "in Christ" occurs twenty-seven times in this epistle. This expression describes the spiritual position of each person that has accepted Jesus Christ as his/her Savior.

Every Christian lives a double life. The people to whom Paul wrote had a human address as well as a spiritual address. They lived "in Ephesus, and they lived "in Christ." The same state of affairs is also true today. Will Oldfield lives in DeFuniak Springs, FL, but Will Oldfield also lives "in Christ." Dallas Burdette lives in Montgomery, AL, but he also lives "in Christ." Every believer at Oakwood Hills has his/her personal address, but every believer at Oakwood Hills also has his/her spiritual address. It is "in Him" that I have been saved. It is "in Him" that I have been sanctified. It is "in Him" that I have been justified. Listen once more as Paul reinforces the place of predestination and the sealing with the Holy Spirit:

> **In him** we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope **in Christ**, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included **in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked **in him** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:11-14**).

Two Blessings: Predestination and Election

Paul in the beginning of this epistle introduces the subject of predestination. But it is worthy of note that for Paul, predestination is "in Him." Salvation is available to all who respond to the call of God, not to a select few chosen before the foundation of the world. Predestination is associated with the body of Christ, not certain individuals. This same truth is taught by Peter and John in their address before the Sanhedrin: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). Paul, too, tells the Christians at Rome: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (**Romans 10:13**). If you wish to be a part of God's elect, then you must experience the new birth. It is our birth in Christ that reconciles us to God. It is in Christ that we become a part of those predestined before the foundation of the world. This knowledge of God's salvation through Christ should cause every believer to boast only in the Lord. Paul speaks of this message in his first letter to Corinth:

> We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began (**1 Corinthians 2:6-7**).

Predestination and Election in Christ

This message of God's wisdom had been hidden before time began and is now made known for our glory. God in His infinite wisdom devised a way He could justify sinful man. This could only be done through His Son Jesus. This is why Paul could write: "It is because of him that you are **in Christ Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'" (**1:30-31**). Yes, Jesus is our "wisdom," our "righteousness," our "holiness," and our "redemption."

The Christian can boast only "in Christ" about his salvation. Christ is central, He is essential, and He is absolute. The third chapter of Romans details God's response to man's sinful and lost condition. Paul captures the very heart of predestination and election when he writes:

> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith **in his blood**. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

Predestination and Election Available To All Who Believe

One's predestination and election hinges upon being in Christ. This predestination and election is obtainable to all who believe in Jesus. Again, Paul brings out this point prior to telling us where justice and mercy kissed each other—at the cross of Calvary.

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through **faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**3:21-25**).

God's salvation is available "to all who believe." It is accessible only "through faith in Jesus Christ." This is what God predestined before the foundation of the world. In other words, salvation is only offered "in" and "through" Jesus. If you want to become a part of the elect, then you must believe in Him. If you want to boast about your salvation, then boast of the fact that in Jesus all spiritual blessings flood into the lives of men and women. He that has ears to hear let him hear; he that has eyes to see let him see. Look at the doxology of praise with fresh eyes. Hear this doxology of praise with fresh ears. Observe that predestination and election occurs in Him and in Him alone. Paul soars, as it were, to the heights of heaven as he seeks to capture the wonder of it all.

All Spiritual Blessings in Christ: Predestination, Election, Redemption, Forgiveness of Sins, and Adoption

> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **in Christ**. For he **chose us in him** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us **in the One he loves**. **In him we have redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he **purposed in Christ**, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. **In him we were also chosen**, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to **hope**

> **in Christ**, might be for the praise of his glory. And **you also were included in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. **Having believed, you were marked in him** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).

The choosing applies to those "in Christ." Predestination has to do with redemption and forgiveness of sins and adoption as sons of God in Christ. The predestined are those who are "in Christ." Eternal life is open "to all who believe." Jesus explains the basis of eternal redemption to Nicodemus this way:

> As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that **everyone who believes may have eternal life in him**. For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that **everyone who believes in him** may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that **through him** the world might be saved. **No one who believes in him** will be judged; but **whoever does not believe** is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son. And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, to prevent his actions from being shown up; but whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God (**John 3:14-21**).

Included in the Spiritual Blessings Through Faith

In Him we were chosen. How does one become a part of the chosen? How does one become a part of the predestined? Paul says, "**you also were included in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (**Ephesians 1:13**). Again, Paul explains election and predestination this way: "**Having believed, you were marked in him"** (**1:13**). Paul could just as easily said, "Having believed you were chosen." He could just as easily said, " Having believed you were predestined." How does one become a part of the elect, the chosen, or the predestined? Paul explains: "through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (**Romans 3:22**).

The Christian glories "in Christ" because he/she realizes that the whole point of the incarnation was that Christ might save us from our sins and reconcile us to God. Christ did all of that for us. He did this for our sakes; He did this for our sins; He did this for our deliverance and emancipation. It is in Him that we are saved; it is in Him that we are sanctified. It is all in Him: wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Every believer is both saint and faithful in Christ Jesus. The Christian is not only one who believes in Christ, but he is in a real sense "in Christ." The believer belongs to Him; he is joined to Him. One cannot help but reflect upon Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,

who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**).

In the sixth chapter of Romans, Paul explains that every believer identified himself/herself with Christ in his/her baptism. Paul writes:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been **united with him like this in his death**, we will certainly also be **united with him in his resurrection**. For we know that our old self was **crucified with him** so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we **died with Christ**, we believe that we will also **live with him**. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but **alive to God in Christ Jesus**. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:1-14**).

Paul is saying that when Christ was crucified, we were crucified with Him; when Christ died, we died with Him; when Christ was buried, we were buried with Him; when Christ rose from the grave, we rose with Him. Jesus is now seated in the heavenly places. We too are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Listen to Paul as he describes this bliss:

> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive **with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up **with Christ** and seated us **with him** in the heavenly realms **in Christ Jesus**, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us **in Christ Jesus**. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:4-10**).

Conclusion

One cannot help but stagger at such truth—we are a part of Christ. Yes, we belong to Him; we are members of the body of Christ; we are not our own; we are bought with a price—His blood. We enjoy all His spiritual blessings because we are "in Christ." In Him we are a part of those predestined and chosen before the foundation of the world. The Christian is one who is "in Christ." One experiences all spiritual blessings in Christ—predestination, election, redemption, forgiveness of sins, and adoption. Salvation comes "through **faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**3:22-25**).

Oakwood Hills Church
DeFuniak Springs, FL
Date: Sunday, September 26, 1999
Time: 11 am

Date: Sunday, October 3, 1999
Time: 11 am

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Be Filled With the Spirit

Thrust Statement: **Ethical behavior is the means by which one determines if he or she is filled with the Holy Spirit.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 5:18**

Paul, in the Ephesian Epistle, states emphatically that the saints in Ephesus are to "be filled with the Spirit" (**5:18**). What does this mean? Is Paul speaking of the baptism of the Spirit that occurred on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**)? Is this the "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh (**Joel 2:28-29**)? Or is this filling associated with ethical conduct? In other words, does this filling have to do with the "fruit of the Spirit" in **Galatians 5:22-26**? As one seeks to understand this phrase, one must again look to the context in order to draw conclusions that fit the framework of the text. Christians ought not to assume that this filling is associated with Spirit baptism. Believers frequently have **Acts 2** in the back of their minds as they read **Ephesians 5:18**.

It is not uncommon for Christians to read **5:18** with the "outpouring" of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-13**). Yet, as one reads **Acts 2**, one is conscious that the supernatural outpouring of the Spirit on this particular day is no more typical than Paul's conversion experience on the Damascus road. The "violent wind" and "the tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (**2:2,3**) are no more characteristic of conversion than the "light from heaven" and the "voice" in the conversion of Saul (**9:3-4**). One does not have to experience this kind of phenomenon to receive the inward experience of salvation with the gift of the Holy Spirit in a non-miraculous measure. Even when one experiences the special gifts of the Spirit, this does not, in and of itself, elevate the gifted person to a state of greater spirituality.

For instance, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians reveals the rivalries that existed in this congregation in spite of the Spiritual gifts. Paul writes: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ" (**1 Corinthians 3:1**).[1] This Epistle begins with recognition of spiritual gifts:

> I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. [5] For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— [6] because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. [7] Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (**1:4-7**).

Even though the Corinthians were showered with spiritual gifts, they lacked being filled with the Spirit. As stated above, Paul writes: "I could not address you as spiritual (πνευματικοι' pneumatikoi), but as "worldly" (σαψρκινοι sarkinoi). In other words, Paul could not address the Corinthians as spiritual but as carnal. One is immediately aware that the Corinthians were not filled with the Spirit even though they possessed spiritual gifts and were sealed by the Spirit. They were still "mere infants in Christ." Once more listen to Paul as he drives home his point about their carnality:

> Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. [2] I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. [3] You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? [4] For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men (**3:1-4**)?

Worldliness still plays a major role in the lives of God's people. Many Christians are not careful about how they live. The full context for this study (**Ephesians 5:18**) is **4:17—6:9**. Prior to Paul's two imperatives in **5:18**, he enumerates a long list of negatives that prevents one from being filled with the Spirit. In **5:15**, he exhorts the believers to "Be very careful, then, how you live." What does this verse mean to you? Does this verse relate to the command to "be filled with the Spirit"? Paul explains his comments by three "not . . . but" contrast in **5:15b** to **5:18**.

5:15	**5:17**	**5:18**
Be very careful, then, how you live—not (μηψ, mh) as unwise but (αςλλαψ, alla) as wise.	Therefore do not (μηψ, mh) be foolish, but (αςλλαψ, alla) understand what the Lord's will is.	Do not (μηψ, mh) get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead (αςλλαψ, alla), be filled with the Spirit.

The NIV hides the Greek structure of this contrast in **5:18** with the word *instead*, which in the Greek text is αςλλαψ (alla). These three "not . . . but" contrasts are followed by six commands:

1. Do not get drunk on wine (**5:18a**).
2. Be filled with the Spirit (**5:18b**).
3. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (**5:19a**).
4. Sing (**5:19b**).
5. Make music (**5:19b**).
6. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (**5:21**).

An examination of the Greek text for **5:18-21** reveals that this text is one sentence in the Greek, but in the NIV there are five sentences with six commands. In the Greek text there are two imperatives—"Do not get drunk" and "be filled with the Spirit"—and five participles:

1. Speaking (λαλου᾽ντε̈, lalountes) to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (**5:19**).[2]
2. Singing (ά[δοντε̈, adontes) [**5:19**].
3. Making music ΄αψλλοντε̈, yallontes) [**5:19**].
4. Giving thanks (ευςχαριστου᾽ντε̈, eucristountes) [**5:20**]
5. Submitting (υΣποτασσοψμενοι, Jupotassomenoi) [**5:21**].

Even though participles may be interpreted as commands, nevertheless, the context indicates that these five participles illustrate the outcome of being filled with the Spirit in **5:18**. As Christians seek to please God in their daily lives, they must understand what the will of God is. Paul addresses this search for ethical behavior in **5:17** that brings honor to God: "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." After enumerating conduct that fails to glorify God, Paul writes: " Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (**5:15-16**). This admonition is similar to Paul's exhortation in **5:8-10**: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10] and find out what pleases the Lord." Paul is concerned about dangerous and unacceptable behavior, or lifestyle. He provides a contrast between giving the "devil a foothold" and "being filled with the Spirit."

The statement in **5:15**—"Be very careful (αςκριβω᾽, akribws, "carefully"), then, how you live"—seems to be motivated from **4:17-19**:

> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. [18] They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. [19] Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Do you live as unbelievers live? Are you darkened in your understanding of God's will for your life? Are your daily actions separated from God's life? Are you a drunkard? Do you go to nightclubs to carouse in drinking bouts that bring dishonor to God? Are you a drug addict? Do you sell illicit drugs? Do you take illicit drugs? Do you indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more? Have you put on the new man—a person created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness? Is your life controlled by bitterness, rage, and anger? Is your life filled with brawling, slander, and every form of malice? Do you forgive others as God forgives you in Christ? Do you live a life of love? Do you participate in obscenity and coarse joking, which is out of place for Christians? Do you approve of the fruitless deeds of darkness? Do you want to be filled with the Spirit? If so, then listen to Paul's answer to how an individual can be filled with the Holy Spirit:

> The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. [14] Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (**Romans 13:12-14**).

God wants individuals to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus; He does not want individuals to gratify their sinful nature. God wants individuals to be filled with His Spirit. Drunkenness was rampant in the first century as it is today. Pay attention to Paul yet again as he seeks to call attention to the life that is and the life that is not filled with the Holy Spirit:

> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. [9] For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. [10] He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (**1 Thessalonians 5:7-11).**

As one turns his or her attention another time to **Ephesians 5:18**, one is reminded that the New Testament never commands one to be baptized with the Spirit, but rather, one observes that the command is: "be filled with the Spirit." "Be filled" (πληρου'σθε plhrousqe) is present tense, passive voice, and imperative mood. The chief evidence of the Spirit's indwelling is moral—for example, the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**. This filling in **Ephesians 5:18** is a repeatable activity in the lives of God's people. This filling can be lost if it is not maintained. If one fails to exemplify godly behavior in his or her life, this breakdown in holy performance grieves the Holy Spirit (**4:30**). In this context (**5:18**), "with the Spirit" (εΣν πνευψματι en pneumati) is similar to Paul's phraseology in **Galatians 5:16, 25** concerning ethical conduct that brings glory to God.

In his Epistle to the Galatians, he exhorts the Galatians to "live by the Spirit" and "you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (**5:16**). But in **5:25**, he rephrases his admonition: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Whether one says, "be filled with the Spirit," or "live by the Spirit," or "keep in step with the Spirit," Paul is referring to ethical conduct that will not grieve the Holy Spirit. To "live by the Spirit" is to bring one's life into harmony with the teachings of Jesus. One cannot read **Galatians 5:19-26** without an awareness that the "fruit of the Spirit" consists of moral qualities. One who is Spirit filled is under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit. "Be filled with the Spirit," for Paul, is not optional, but mandatory.

The verb plhrousqe ("be filled") is second person plural. In other words, this command is addressed to the entire Christian community. No one is to get drunk; every believer is to be Spirit-filled. This verb is also passive. Paul is saying, "Let the Spirit fill you." This passive verb is significant in its implications. One should eradicate from his or her life what grieves the Holy Spirit; one should cast aside ungodly

behavior that prevents the Spirit from exercising control over his or her life. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians helps to clarify this verb in **Ephesians 5:18**. For example, he writes in **Colossians 3:16**: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." From this parallel, one realizes that one must never separate the Spirit and the Word of God. The words of Jesus should dwell abundantly in every believer. Christians should not give the "devil a foothold" (**Ephesians 4:27**).

Another aspect of Greek grammar in this verb ("be filled") is that it is present tense. In Greek there are two kinds of imperative—an aorist imperative describing a single action and a present imperative describing an action that is continuous. For example, in **John 2: 7**, Jesus says, "Fill the jars with water." The verb γεμιψσατε (gemisate, "fill") is aorist, active, and imperative. The imperative is aorist since the jars were to be filled only once. On the other hand, when Paul writes: "Be filled with the Spirit," he uses a present imperative, which conveys the ideas that the filling is to be continuous. Since the Spirit has sealed Christians (**Ephesians 1:13; 4:30**), then Christians should allow the Spirit to saturate their lives continuously. Paul captures this concept of allowing the Spirit to control their day-to-day behavior in his Epistle to Rome:

> Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. [6] The mind of sinful man[e] is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; [7] the sinful mind[f] is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. [8] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. [9] You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. [10] But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. [11] And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (**Romans 8:5-11**).

This announcement by Paul is very similar to his admonition that led to him to the command in **Ephesians 5:18**. For a second time, one should reread the verses preceding this verse in order to grasp the point that Paul seeks to convey:

> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. [17] Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. [18] Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. [19] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (**5:15-20**).

Paul, as stated above, uses equivalent expressions to enhance one's understanding of this concept of "be filled with the Spirit." For example, Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida write:

> In a number of languages it is difficult, if not impossible, to speak of "being filled with the Spirit." Such an expression is so frequent in the Scriptures

that it would seem to make sense in any language, but this is simply not true. One can, however, use an equivalent expression such as "be controlled by the Spirit" or "let the Spirit rule you" or "let the Spirit live within you."[3]

Paul draws a contrast between a pagan's way of life and a Christians' way of life—in or out of the public assembly. In order for one to bear faithful and effective testimony for Jesus Christ, one must be "filled with the Spirit," that is to say, one's life must be under the control of the Holy Spirit. In other words, one's thoughts and one's life must be taken up with Jesus Christ, to whom the Spirit bears witness. Earlier, Paul elaborated on the negative aspects of ethical conduct that portrayed a life devoid of God's Spirit (**4:17—5:18a**). Participation in the works of the flesh grieves God's Holy Spirit who dwells in those who have become a part of the elect (**4:30**). Beginning with **5:18b**, Paul issues an order in which he tells the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit." After issuing this command, he expresses this filling, as stated above, with five participles: (1) speaking, (2) singing, (3) psalming, (4) giving thanks, and (5) submitting.

Speaking (First Participle)

It is significant that three of the participles have to do with singing (**5:19**). The first is: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." "Speak" equals "speaking" or "addressing" one another. Christians are not to engage in lewd singing, but in singing that builds one another up in the faith. This singing is not limited to a so-called worship service; it is one's way of life—twenty-four hours a day. Dr. S. D. F. Salmond is correct when he writes:

> There is nothing, however, to suggest the thought of actual worship. The sentence specifies one of the ways in which the condition of being "filled with the Sprit" expresses itself. In their intercourse one with another their language would not be that of ordinary convention, far less that of base intoxication, but that of spiritual devotion and thankfulness.[4]

Singing and Playing (Second and Third Participles)

Whether Christians assemble for corporate worship or not, the teaching is the same. One can only surmise from this context that the meetings of God's people must have been musical occasions for exhorting one another and offering praise to God through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The word *psalms* imply a musical instrument.[5] The next two participles also develop the kind of music employed among God's people—singing and making music. Once again, Stott's comments are helpful in identification of these two kinds of music: "*Singing and making melody* (perhaps the verbs combine vocal and instrumental music to the *Lord with all your heart* (verse 19)."[6] In this same vein, Salmond comments:

> What the distinctions are, if any, between the three terms has been considerably disputed. ψαλμός (yalmos) is a religious song, especially one sung to a musical accompaniment, and *par excellence* an OT psalm; ὑμνός (Jumnos) is properly speaking a song of praise; ᾠδή (wdh) is the

most general term, applicable to all kinds of songs, secular or sacred, accompanied or unaccompanied.[7]

Since many Christians object to instrumental music in their so-called worship service, it is necessary to deal with the word *psalms* in seeking to understand what it is that Paul speaks of as a part of being filled with the Spirit. T. K. Abbott is also helpful in understanding the word *psalms*, he writes: "ψαλμοῖς (Yalmos) from ψάλλειν, (yallein) primarily the plucking of the strings, is used by classical authors to mean the sound of the harp, and hence any strain of music."[8] Why did Paul mention both "singing" and "playing" ("making melody," KJV) if both are identical? R. C. H. Lenski is quite beneficial in understanding **5:19**:

> "Giving utterance" is general; the next two participles specify: "Singing and playing with your heart to the Lord." Singing is done by the means of the voice; playing by means of an instrument. ψάλλω (Yallw) means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice. Thus the two are here combined: "singing and playing." "Making melody" (our versions) will do if it is applied to instruments. But the view of some commentators that the dative indicates place: "in your heart," and that this is silent singing in the heart, is untenable. "Giving utterance" does not refer to audible music, over against which the non-audible "in your heart" is placed. There is no καὶ (kai) before the second participle. The second and the third participle define the first: *all acts* are audible. "Giving utterance" means: by singing with the voice and by playing on instruments. But this is never to be only mechanical it is to be done "with your heart to the Lord: and not merely with the lips and fingers for men. The dative "for the Lord" is like the reflexive "for yourselves." We ourselves and the Lord go together; all this music is between him and us. He wants no lip service from us. We must sing and play to him "with our heart," and he ever looks to the heart.[9]

Lenski has brought out the Greek text that Christians frequently overlook in their analysis of this passage. Many within the Churches of Christ interpret "making melody in your heart to the Lord" as the heart, that is, the heart is the instrument that is to be played, which excludes musical instruments. This odd approach to **Ephesians 5:19** is with strong subjective biases, so it seems to me, against instrumental music. Many within the Stone/Campbell Movement view this text through colored glasses. "Making melody" is simply the same as "making music." One makes music by playing instruments. Some translations capture the meaning of "making melody" in their versions. For example, *The Net Bible* translates the Greek text as follows: "Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music[27] in[28] your hearts to the Lord."[10]

In is in this vein that *The New American Bible* also translates this Greek word yallontes as "playing": "Addressing one another (in) psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts."[11] This translation reveals that to "make music" is the same as "playing." Another translation that captures the meaning of the Greek word ψάλλοντες (pallontes) is *The New International Version:* "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in

your heart to the Lord."[12] Once more, *The Jewish New Testament* also grabs hold of the meaning of the Greek word: "Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to each other; sing to the Lord and make music in your heart to him;"[13]

In Your Heart

Some religious journals, especially within the Churches of Christ, place emphasis upon "in your heart" as the instrument. The argument generally proceeds upon this line: "One is to play or strike the cords of the heart." But is this what Paul is saying? One must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down from the church fathers. The traditions of the church often make it difficult, if not almost impossible, for Christians to go back to the text and read it without spectacles. Another translation should help one to grasp the significance of the phrase "in your heart" as simply meaning "with all your heart." For example, the *Revised Standard Version* renders this phrase this way: "Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart."[14] The *Contemporary English Bible* translates this verse: "When you meet together, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as you praise the Lord with all your heart."[15] John R. W. Stott, as usual, encapsulates the very essence of the phrase with clarity:

> This leads to the second result of the Spirit's fullness, which is "singing and making melody" to the Lord. The Holy Spirit loves to glorify the Lord Jesus, so manifesting him to his people that they delight to sing his praise. Unmusical people have sometimes taken comfort from this exhortation to sing to the Lord "in your hearts" (AV), as if their jubilation could be entirely inward, intended only "for the ears of the Lord" (J. B. Phillips). But the RSV is probably right to translate the expression "with all your heart." The heart is not so much the place as the manner in which we are to sing. The apostle exhorts us not to silence, but to heartfelt worship.[16]

As one seeks to uncover the truths of God's Word, it is necessary to cite sources to help one in his or her recovery of the intent of the text. The following is another lengthy text, but this citation also helps one to get rid of the mishandling of this text by many sincere Christians. Listen to Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown as they elaborate upon both ψάλλοντες (yallontes, "playing") and τῇ καρδίᾳ (th kardia, "with the heart"):

> The Spirit give true eloquence; wine, a spurious eloquence. **Psalms**—generally accompanied by an instrument. **Hymns**—in direct praise to God (cf. Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:26; Jas. 5:13). **Songs**—the general term for lyric pieces; "spiritual" is added to mark their being here restricted to sacred subjects, thought not merely to direct praises of God, but also containing exhortations, prophecies, etc. Contrast the drunken "songs," Amos 8:10. **Making melody**—Greek, "playing and singing with an instrument." **In your heart**—not merely with the tongue; but the serious feeling of the heart accompanying the singing of the lips (cf. 1. Cor. 14:15; Ps 47:7).[17]

As one seeks to unravel the true meaning of "in your heart" (τῇ καρδίᾳ, th kardia), it would be helpful for one to look at a similar phrase in **Colossians 3:16**:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

"With gratitude in your hearts" (εςν τή' χαψριτι ά[δοντë εςν ταϊ' καρδιψαϊ υΣμω'ν, en th cariti adontes en tais kardiais Jumwn, "with grace singing in your hearts"). As noted, the NIV translates this Greek phrase as "With gratitude in your hearts," which is equivalent to Paul's words in **Epheisans 5:19**. Paul, in his writings, frequently varies his expression to express the same idea. For instance, in the **sixth chapter of Ephesians**, he writes concerning slaves' obedience to their masters: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (**6:5**). "With sincerity of heart" is a translation of εςν αΣπλοψτητι τή' καρδιψά (en Japlothti ths kardias, "in singleness of the heart"). Again, Paul fluctuates his expression in this same chapter when he addresses the slaves: "Doing the will of God from your heart" (εςκ΄υχή', ek yuchs, "from [the] soul") [**6:6**].

Again, Paul modifies his expression in order to capture forcefully the necessity of the heart in one's relationship with his or her master: "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men" (**6:7**). The phrase "Serve wholeheartedly" is from the Greek μετ= ευςνοιψά (met eunoias, "good will"). Whether one says "in your heart" or "with sincerity of heart" or "from the heart" or "serve wholeheartedly," one is saying the same thing with synonymous expressions. In the **Book of Romans**, Paul comments upon the Romans as having been obedient to the ethical teachings of Jesus as having come "from the Heart" (KJV). Paul writes: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted (**Romans 6:17**).

The NIV translates the Greek text as "wholeheartedly." The word *wholeheartedly* is from the Greek εςκ καρδιψά (εςκ kardias, "out of [the] heart"). Peter, too, uses this same Greek phrase εςκ καρδιψά (εςκ kardias "out of [the] heart") in his admonition that Christians should love one another: " Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart[b] (**1 Peter 1:22**). For Paul, "singing and playing" are never mechanical—it is to be done with the heart. In conclusion of this analysis of "in your heart," the following words of Solomon concerning his Father, David, sums up the meaning one should attach to this phrase:

> My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. [18] But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart (**1 Kings 8:17-18**).

Giving Thanks (Fourth Participle)

If one sings and plays with gratitude in one's heart to the Lord, this mindset will result in a life that is exuberant in thanksgiving for salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. This fourth participle describes one of the ways that one is filled with the Spirit. It is the Spirit of thankfulness for what God has accomplished for humanity in

and through Jesus Christ. Paul writes: "Aways giving thanks (ευχαριστου'ντε, eucaristountes) to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**5:20**). This exhortation must be read within the context of the **Book of Ephesians**. As one reflects upon the doctrine of the Trinity in this short Epistle, one observes that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working together to bring about salvation. This comprehension of redemption should awaken within everyone a spirit of thanksgiving. In other words, this knowledge of redemption informs and directs one's devotion to the Trinity. Paul's reflection upon redemption resulted in his cry:

> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [4] For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he[a] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding (**Ephesians 1:3-8**).

In verses three and six, one observes that the word *praise* is employed twice. Knowledge of God's mystery evokes spiritual devotion and thankfulness for salvation by grace in and through Jesus. **Ephesians 5:20** is a part of the **verse 19**: "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**5:20**). "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" qualifies the participle "giving thanks." When one puts into practice the three previous participles, one's life will be a life of "giving thanks" for "everything." One's life that is filled with thanksgiving will be a life that expresses itself in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Earlier, Paul speaks of "thanksgiving" following his renunciation of ethical behavior:

> Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [3] But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (**5:1-4**).

Why did Paul throw in the word *thanksgiving* in verse four? Is Paul insisting on the grace of thankfulness for the gift of His love to sinful men and women? Paul reminds his readers of God's gift of love, namely, Jesus Christ. One should not live a life of wickedness, but rather a life of thankfulness for God's Atonement through Jesus Christ. Thankfulness will be expressed individually as well as corporately. A part of this thankfulness issues in prayers of thanks for all saints: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks (ευχαριστω'ν, eucharistwn) for you, remembering you in my prayers" (**1:15-16**). Does intercession of thankfulness for God's people overflow in your prayers?

Since Paul does not define its content, nevertheless, he demonstrates in the remainder of this Epistle how the giving of thanks relates to what God has accomplished for the Christian community by forgiving their sins, raising them with Christ, making them into a new people, accepting them through faith in Jesus, and giving the Holy Spirit as a seal of one's inheritance. Ernest Best writes: "Not sexual lust and covetousness, but thanksgiving is the fitting response to God's goodness and is basic to Christian existence."[18] These unholy vices will not be named among God's people, but, on the other hand, the lives of God's children will abound in being filled with the Spirit (**5:18-20**), which issues in speaking "to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**5:19-20**). One's life should never be devoid of this characteristic.

Submitting (Fifth Participle)

In this participle, Paul continues to explain what it means for one to "be filled with the Spirit." Paul writes: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (**5:21**). This attribute is not the way of the world. It is the basic nature of individuals to dominate others. Yet, this admonition of submission is the will of God. Just as there is spiritual singing with gratitude in the heart, so there must be joyful harmony within the family of God. It is for this reason that Paul writes earlier: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:1-3**). Whether one is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, president of a university or garbage collector, one can only accomplish unity among God's people by "being submissive" (υΣποτασσοψμενοι, Jupotassomenoi, "being subject") to "one another in the fear of the Lord" (**5:21**).

It is in this same vein that Paul writes in the Roman Epistle as he defines one's act of spiritual worship—"to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—that is your spiritual act of worship" (**Romans 12:1**). In this discussion of what this "spiritual act of worship" means, he enumerates many qualities that develops this thought, but the one quality that this essay wishes to emphasize is found in **verse 10**: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." Peter, too, cautioned those who were shepherds over God's family (not over in the sense of rulers, but of leaders) to exercise caution in guiding God's people as examples of godly behavior:

> To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. [5] Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

> "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."[a] [6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (**1 Peter 5:1-7**).

This subject of humility permeates the writings of Paul. In his Philippian Epistle, he uses Christ as an example of the kind of meekness that Christians should manifest toward one another. Pay attention to Paul as he drives home this point of surrender:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (**Philippians 2:1-4**).

Is there tenderness and compassion in your day-to-day walk with God? Do you consider others better than yourself? Do you just look out for number one, of do you look out for others? Do you look down on others who are not in your social status? Is your life filled with meekness? Is your life overflowing with gentleness? How do you respond to these questions? Paul gives Christ as a pattern that Christians should emulate in their dealings with others. Listen to Paul as he uses the greatest example of humility in the universe:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross (**2:5-8**)!

Shortly before His death upon the Cross, Jesus had to deal with this subject of submission. Some of the disciples wanted places of preeminence in the kingdom. When the other ten learned of this plot, they were indignant (**Matthew 20:20-24**). It was then that Jesus called them together and said:

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. [26] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (**20:25-28**).

The words that Jesus employs in this pericope (unit) is quite revealing. He refers to the "rulers" (α[ρχοντë, arcontes) of the Gentiles as leaders who actually "lord it over" (κατακυριευψουσιν, katakurieuousin) them and that their high officials "exercise authority over" (κατεξουσιαψζουσιν, katexousiazousin) them. This

Scripture is quite revealing concerning the true nature of behavior in God's kingdom. Christ did not "come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." God's leaders are not rulers. They cannot "exercise authority over them" nor can they "lord it over" God's people. Paul's example of Christ in **Philippians 2:1-11** and Peter's admonition in **1 Peter 5:1-7** should humble every believer to serve, not to lord it over others.

Shortly after Jesus' rebuke of His disciples, He again calls attention to the desire for preeminence among God's people. Matthew lists these seven woes against the religious leaders as he brings his Book to a close. Take notice once more to Jesus as He focuses in on one of these seven woes against the religious leaders for their hypocrisy:

> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [3] So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. [4] They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. [5] "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; [6] they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; [7] they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' [8] "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. [9] And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. [10] Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.[b] [11] The greatest among you will be your servant. [12] For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (**22:2-12**).

CONCLUSION

One's reflection upon Paul's admonition to "be filled with the Spirit" should revolutionize one's ethical conduct to God's glory. One who is filled with the Spirit will not allow alcohol to control his or her life. One who is filled with the Spirit will not participate in lewd songs, but rather will take part in spiritual hymns, psalms, and songs to God's glory. One who is filled with the Spirit will sing and play wholeheartedly to the Lord. One who if filled with the Spirit will become servant to others in God's kingdom. One who is filled with God's Spirit will put on the fruits of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (**Galatians 5:22-23**). One who is filled with the Spirit will put off the acts of the sinful nature as described in **Galatians 5:19-21.** In this section Paul enumerates actions that fails to allow the Spirit to fill one's life:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If one wishes to understand what it really and truly means to be filled with the Spirit, one should begin his or her reading with **Ephesians 4:17** and conclude with **6:20** to fully grasp what determines whether one is or is not filled with the Spirit. Are you filled with the Spirit of God? Listen, all over again, to the words of Paul:

> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. [19] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [21] Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (**5:18-21**).

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[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2]*The NET Bible; Bible. English. NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2003; 2003, CD).

e Or *mind set on the flesh*

f Or *the mind set on the flesh*

[3]Bratcher, Robert G., and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, Originally published under title: A translator's handbook on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.1983, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators, Eph 5:18 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 135.

[4] S. D. F. Salmond, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* in Robertson Nicoll, Editor, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 3:363.

[5] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (originally published as *God's New Society*, 1979, Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 205.

[6] Ibid., 206.

[7] Salmond, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 363.

[8] T. K. Abbott, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 162.

[9] R. C. H. Lenski, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Commentary on the New Testament (originally published in 1937; Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 620-621.

27 [27] **tn** See BDAG 1096 s.v. ψάλλω.

28 [28] **tn** Or "with."

[10]Biblical Studies Press. *The NET Bible; Bible. English. NET Bible.*, Eph 5:19, Biblical Studies Press, 2003; 2003.

[11]Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. *The New American Bible : Translated from the Original Languages With Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources and the Revised New Testament*, Eph 5:19, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1996, c1986.

[12]*The Holy Bible : New International Version*, Eph 5:19. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984.

[13]Stern, David H. *Jewish New Testament : A Translation of the New Testament That Expresses Its Jewishness*. 1st ed., Eph 5:19. Jerusalem, Israel; Clarksville, Md., USA: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1989.

[14]*The Revised Standard Version*, Eph 5:19. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1971.

[15]*Contemporary English Version*. electronic ed., Eph 5:19.

[16] John R. W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1964), 44.

[17] Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Ephesians* in *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1295/

b Some early manuscripts *from a pure heart*

a 4,5 Or *sight in love. He*

[18] Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 480.

a Prov. 3:34

a Or *in the form of*

b Or *the form*

a That is, boxes containing Scripture verses, worn on forehead and arm

b Or *Messiah*

Thrust statement: **Predestination and election are only in Christ Jesus.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:3-6.**

As one reflects upon the subject of *election*, one observes from Peter that Jesus is the Elect from eternity: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen (ejklekto;n, *eklekton*) by God and precious to him" (**1 Peter 2:4**).[1] Jesus was *chosen* and precious. When did this *election* of Jesus take place? This election, according to Peter, was before the creation of the world. He says, "He was chosen before (proegnwsmevnou, *proegnoosmenou*, "having been foreknown") the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (**1 Peter 1:20**).

Peter confirms what God had previously revealed in the transfiguration of Jesus before Peter, James, and John. Luke tells his readers: "A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen (ejklelegmevno"); listen to him" (**Luke 9:35**). Again, at the crucifixion, the "people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One (oJ ejklektov") [**23:35**]. Both texts speak of Jesus as the Elect One. By means of Jesus, God bestows all spiritual blessings. In order for one to become a part of God's elect, one must be in Jesus who is the Elect One of God. No one out of Him will be saved. If one wishes to become a part of God's elect, then one must be in Christ.

It was God's purpose that all who put their trust "in him" should become children of God. In other words, no one out of Him was chosen (elected) to eternal life, thus, no one out of Him will be saved. This is why Paul could write:

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesians 1:4**). Again, Paul writes:

> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ (**1:7-9**).

There is a tendency among many Christians to abuse the predestination and election passages. The current interpretation among many is to say that predestination and election are fixed concerning certain individuals, thus there is no need of any effort on the part of any individual to respond to the good news of God. The logical conclusion, according to some theologians, is this: if God has an eternal plan of predestination and election, then no matter how men may live, no matter how heinous their rebellion, no matter how much they reject God, they cannot be lost if they were elected to eternal life before the foundation of the world. In other words, they will be saved since He has elected them to eternal life. This philosophy advances the notion that no one can change that plan of eternal damnation or eternal life. Since this condition of eternal life is predestined before the foundation of the world, then one might as well enjoy life by indulgence in sin, at least this conclusion is the logical consequence of such a notion.

A careful reading of the epistle to the Ephesians reveals that Paul held to no such view of the doctrine of predestination. For Paul, one's apprehension of predestination should excite the gratitude of believers and make men and women holy and without blame before Him in love (**1:4**). It is true that God has chosen us, but this election is to be found only in Jesus: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (**1:4-5**). One's adoption and election can only be in the Elect One. The whole choice and purpose of salvation had reference to Him and outside of Him no one was/is chosen.

The election of individuals is Christocentric. In other words, the election of men is comprehended only in Christ. For Paul, when one is outside of Christ, then there is no election. This election is associated with Christ, not apart from Christ. Listen to Paul as he enumerates the various activities associated with Christ: (1) "every spiritual blessing in Christ" [**Ephesians 1:3**], (2) "chose us in him" [**1:4**], (3) "freely forgiven us in the One he loves" [**1:6**], (4) "in him we have redemption" [**1:7**], (5) "made known to us the mystery . . . which he purposed in Christ" [**1:9**], (6) "In him we were all chosen" [**1:11**], (7) "you also were included in Christ, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" [**1:13**], and (8) "You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" [**1:13**].

Christ assumed the Messianic office by the Father's appointment. Matthew relates an incident in the life of Jesus in which he calls attention to Jesus as the chosen (elect) servant of God:

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

> "Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
> the one I love, in whom I delight;
> I will put my Spirit on him,
> and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
> He will not quarrel or cry out;
> no one will hear his voice in the streets.
> A bruised reed he will not break,
> and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
> till he leads justice to victory.
> In his name the nations will put their hope" (**Matthew 12:15-21**).

Matthew cites **Isaiah 42:1-7** to highlight Jehovah's election of the Servant-Messiah. For Matthew, Jesus is the Servant–Messiah. He is the "servant whom I have chosen, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight" (**Isaiah 40:1**). Again, Isaiah says,

> "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
> I will take hold of your hand.
> I will keep you and will make you
> to be a covenant for the people
> and a light for the Gentiles,
> to open eyes that are blind,
> to free captives from prison
> and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (**40: 6-7**).

John reports an incidence between the religious leaders and Jesus concerning His having come from God: "what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?" (**John 10:36**). Jesus was aware of His election and mediatorial office as originating in God. His redemption mission was the express design and will of His Father. In Jesus, who is the Elect from eternity, is located the compassionate election of men.

Election, in eternity past, was predicated on the work of Christ before the foundation of the world. Isaiah spoke of the work of God's chosen One in accomplishing a way of salvation for all those who put their trust in Him:

> Surely he took up our infirmities
> and carried our sorrows,
> yet we considered him stricken by God,
> smitten by him, and afflicted.

> But he was pierced for our transgressions,
> he was crushed for our iniquities;
> the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
> and by his wounds we are healed.
> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
> each of us has turned to his own way;
> and the LORD has laid on him
> the iniquity of us all (**Isaiah 53:4-6**).

Peter praises God for a living hope (**1 Peter 1:3-12**). This living hope is based upon God's Elect from eternity—before the foundation of the world. Peter says,

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

If one refuses to confess Jesus as Lord, then this one is not a part of the elect of God, because he/she is not in the Elect of God. Paul addresses this issue of salvation based upon confession of Jesus as Lord in his letter to the Romans:

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (**Romans 10:8-13**).

According to Paul, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" will not be lost. Again, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." These statements by Paul contradict the views of election and predestination advanced by many sincere believers. As stated above, this election of individuals has no separate existence independently of the Elect of God (**Luke 9:35**; **23:35**). The election to salvation is only in union with Christ. Yes, Paul does advance the concept that individuals were chosen "before the creation of the world" (**Ephesians 1:4**). But, Paul does not stop with that statement alone. Rather, he adds a prepositional phrase: "in him." This "in him" qualifies who the ones are that are a part of the elect of God. Christ is the "one

mediator between God and men" (**1 Timothy 1:5**). He is the Living Covenant of reconciliation and election.

Matthew, as stated above, cites **Isaiah 42** to call attention to Jesus as the elect Servant of Yahweh. Isaiah says, "I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people" (**42:6**). It is in Him and Him alone that men are elected and outside of Him no man is elected. The election to salvation is corporate as well as Christocentric. In other words, the election of Christ involves the election of the church: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). The New Testament comprehends believers, not in isolation, but as members of the body of the elect. The election of individual men and women cannot be isolated from the church that is His body. Jesus is the Elect of God.

As one peruses the entire epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, one quickly observes that election is corporate, not individualistic, that is to say, it is not separate and apart from Christ. For instance, Paul writes: "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (**2:12-13**). Again, as Paul concludes his epistle, he calls attention to the role of the church (body of Christ) in the scheme of redemption:

> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body (**5:22-30**).

Conclusion

The election of any man or woman is an election within the sphere of the elect community of God, namely the body of Christ. Election is established and marked out in the election of Jesus Christ. Christ is the true Elect. The election that Paul addresses in his epistles is not in respect to particular individuals—unconditionally elected—but rather, the election is in respect to the body of Christ (*ekklhsia)*. This union with Christ comes about through faith in

Jesus. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, expresses forcefully the method God employs to incorporate one into the Elect of God:

> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (**2 Thessalonians 2:13-14**).

God chose the Thessalonians to be saved through "the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth," God did not select them separate and apart from these two truths. Once more, the words of Paul are to the point in the first chapter of Ephesians: "you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**Ephesians 1:13**). Were they unconditionally elected without respect to the gospel of God? No! Paul emphasizes that they were included when they believed, not before. In conclusion, consider the following Scriptures that capture the concept that election is only in the body of Christ:

> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (**Ephesians 1:4-5**).

> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (**Colossians 1:22-23**).

> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (**Ephesians 5:25-27**).

> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ (**Ephesians 1:7-9**).

From the above Scriptures, one observes that the election is corporate and comprehends individuals only in association with the Elect body, that is to say, the Body of Christ. Perhaps, one more Scripture is appropriate to summarize

this message on "Election of Men is Comprehended Only In Christ." Listen to John as he calls attention to life and where it is to be found:

> And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (**1 John 5:11-12**).

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faithful --IN-- christ Jesus

Thrust statement: **Faithfulness in Christ involves both belief and obedience.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:1-3**

Paul immediately calls alertness to the position and description of God's children in Ephesus. He refers to them as "saints," "faithful," and "in Christ Jesus." He starts this letter by calling attention to his personal call to serve God as an act from God's will. He then concludes this verse with "grace and peace" from God. Paul is very concise concerning the Ephesians as to their state of affairs and location in God's kingdom: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**Ephesians 1:1**). [1] This message is designed to call attention to one's lifestyle and to one's belief in Jesus as the Son of God. If one has faith in God and Jesus, then one's behavior will drastically change.

STEADFASTNESS AS ONE'S WAY OF LIFE: EXERCISING FAITH

The word *faithful* is, to some extent, "unfortunate," writes Lloyd Jones. [2] He translates the Greek word for faithful as "exercising faith." Perhaps the best way to explain this word *faithful* is to say that the word *faithful* involves

active believing. Our English word *faithful* carries the following meanings: true, realistic, authentic, true to life, truthful, believable, and so on. One cannot separate belief from faithfulness. One cannot be faithful in his/her walk with God unless one actively believes that Jesus is the Savior of the world. When one believes that Jesus is the savior of the world, then this belief will result in an "exercising faith."

One must combine the fruit of the Spirit with an active faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul writes to the Galatians concerning "exercising faith":

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**Galatians 5:22-26**).

True faith in God and Jesus demands ethical behavior that glorifies God. Ethical behavior follows faith and salvation. Salvation *begins* and *ends* with faith. One cannot approach God or Jesus without faith. Paul, in his letter to Rome, stresses the nature of salvation: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:17**). Do you believe in Jesus? Jesus informed the religious leaders: "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (**John 8:23**).

It is in this same vein of faith that the Hebrew writer says: "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (**Hebrews 11:6**). This kind of faith results in good deeds. Thus, Paul could address the Christians in Ephesus as: "faithful in Christ Jesus." Are you living a life worthy of your calling (**Ephesians 4:1**)? True faith calls for holiness—"without holiness no one will see the Lord" (**12:14**). Jesus, too, emphasizes the necessity of adherence to His teachings: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**John 8:31-32**).

Following the list of worthies in **Hebrews 11**, the author reminds his readers about this "great cloud of witnesses" as examples of belief and obedience (**12:1**). Because of their faith in God, he instructs them to live out their faith in active obedience (faithfulness):

> Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of

> God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (**12:1-3**).

Have you discarded everything that holds you back in your daily walk with God? Have you laid aside every sin that ensnares you in your Christian march? When you think of sin, what comes to your mind? When you think of "acts of the sinful nature," what comes to your mind? Is your concept of sin the same as that of Paul in his letter to the Christians in the province of Galatia? Paul enumerates a list of ungodly acts that could jeopardize one's salvation:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Galatians 5:19-21**).

In crucifying the "acts of the sinful nature," you need to "fix your eyes on Jesus." This Hebrew letter was addressed to saints in Christ; they were encouraged to faithfulness in their day after day walk with God. Every believer must possess an active obedience—faithfulness—in one's worship of God. It is this concept—belief and obedience—that Paul is writing about to the Ephesians: "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (**Ephesians 1:1**). Are you "faithful in Christ Jesus"? How does your life measure up to the teachings of Jesus?

Faithfulness is one of the means whereby Christians demonstrate that they worship God with awe and reverence. True worship is not going through five ritualistic acts—singing, praying, preaching, communion, and giving—on Sunday morning, but rather, true worship has to do with the way individuals live. Listen to the Hebrew author as he encourages holiness in the life of God's people as genuine worship: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" (**Hebrews 12:28**). Immediately, the author enumerates various activities of godly behavior and then describes these actions as sacrifices pleasing to God:

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (**13:15-16**).

One's "spiritual act of worship" is not going through rituals on Sunday morning, but rather it is in presenting one's body as "a living sacrifice." Paul describes this kind of worship in his epistle to the Romans:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your

> mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Are you presenting your bodies as "living sacrifices"? Are you "faithful in Christ Jesus"? Belief in Jesus as the Son of God results in faithfulness. Conceivably, one cannot say with absolute certainty the exact meaning of the word *faithful* as intended by Paul—perhaps both meanings are involved. But this exposition of "faithful in Christ Jesus" approaches both aspects: (1) belief in Jesus, and (2) active obedience to the teachings of Jesus' Sermon (**Matthew 5—7**). The word *faithful* includes belief in Christ Jesus as well as firmness and loyalty to the teachings of Jesus. Every believer that is "faithful in Christ Jesus" exercises faith in Him as his or her way of life.

FAITHFULNESS: BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

Scholarship is not agreed upon the exact meeting of the adjective employed by Paul in this verse. Some biblical commentators and translators interpret this word *faithful* as a noun rather than as an adjective. For instance, the following translation translates the Greek word as '"believers' in Christ Jesus" **(1:1—NCV)**;[3] on the other hand, *The Living Bible* paraphrases this word as "ever loyal to the Lord."[4] Paul appears to employ the word *faithful* in the sense of "exercising faith," but this definition would not exclude belief. The word *faithful* does carry the idea of <u>believing in Christ Jesus</u>. The picture is that of trust. This concept is also set forth in the celebration of the salvation passages in this same chapter (**1:12-14**). Listen to Paul as he captures the essence of his earlier word *faithful*:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. <u>Having believed</u>, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**).

Again, Paul expresses the blessings open to those who believe:

> I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power <u>for us who believe</u>. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (**1:18-21**).

If you are "saints in Christ Jesus," then you are also "believers in Christ Jesus." If you are saints in Christ Jesus, then you are also faithful in the sense of adhering to the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But what does it really mean to "exercise faith"? Exercising faith includes trust in Jesus, even in the absence of seeing Christ in the flesh; you still believe that He is alive. An example of this kind of faith is found in the Gospel of John. John tells us that following the resurrection of Jesus that He appeared to ten of His disciples (**John 20:19-23**). On this occasion, Thomas was absent. Shortly thereafter, the disciples informed Thomas about the appearance of the Lord Jesus, but he refused to believe. John gives the readers Thomas' reaction to the conversation with the other disciples:

> Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (**20:24-25**).

A week later, Jesus provided an opportunity for Thomas in his conquest of faith. John relates this incident by sayings,

> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (**John 20:26-29**).

What kind of faith do you exercise toward the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you put your trust in Jesus as Savior? Are you bringing your life into harmony with His teachings? Do you look to Him for eternal life? If so, then you must believe that He is Son of God, and you must walk in light, not in darkness. Jesus tells Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**John 3:16-21**).

CONCLUSION:
BELIEF AND OBEDIENCE

BELIEF. Faith in the Lord Jesus requires one to believe in Jesus as the One and only unique Son of God. The one who "exercises faith" believes in the incarnation. The one who works out his faith is one who clings to the words: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**1:14**). The one who puts his faith into action is one who affirms the vocabulary of John as he opens the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (**1:1-2**). Every believer accepts as true that Christ came into this world to taste death for every man (**Hebrews 2:9**). All saints believe in the efficacy of the blood of Jesus (**Ephesians 2:13**; **Hebrews 9:11-14**).

OBEDIENCE. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ requires one to crucify the flesh with its sinful lust. Paul stresses this point of crucifixion in his letter to the churches in the province of Galatia: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (**Galatians 5:24**). Since every saint has been redeemed by the grace of God, then this salvation calls for a radical change in one's way of Life. Paul reminds Titus of this truth:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:11-15**).

When you reflect upon the words "faithful in Christ Jesus," do you recall the words of Paul as he brings this letter to a close? For Paul, in order for one to be "faithful" in Jesus, then one must walk in light as a child of light, not as a child of darkness. Listen to Paul as he spells out Christian behavior:

> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were

> taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (**Ephesians 4:17-32**).

Are you walking in light or darkness? Are you imitators of God in your behavior? How does one imitate God in his or her walk with God? Again, one should reflect upon the words of Paul as he reflects upon good performance that is indicative of every Christian:

> Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret (**5:1-12**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

[2] D. M. Lloyd-Jones, God's *Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 28. I am also indebted to Lloyd-Jones for the genesis of my thoughts for this message. See also Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Illinois: Victor Books, 1976), 10, where he says, "The word *faithful* carries the meaning of 'believers in Christ Jesus.'" See also R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians,* (1937; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 346 (page reference is to reprint edition), where he writes, "When it is used as an adjective it may mean 'faithful' or 'trustworthy.' Here it means 'believers.'"

[3] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

[4] *The Living Bible*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1997.

Jesus Is Our Prince of Peace

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is God's peace for sinful humanity.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 2:14**

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of God is about peace with God and with one another. The Good News of God is that God came into the world through the Incarnation bringing salvation, righteousness, forgiveness, mercy, and peace. Christ came not only to proclaim a Gospel, but also to be a Gospel, that is to say, He is the Gospel of God in all that He did for the deliverance of humanity from the Fall by restoring peace between God and humanity. As one approaches **Ephesians 2:14**, one is confronted with one of the most penetrating Scriptures in this Book—"He himself is our peace."[1] If one wishes peace with God, one can only find this peace in and through Jesus Christ. If one wishes peace with others who are also members of the community of the Resurrection, this peace can only be found in the Savior of the world.

Peace is not the absence of war and tragedy in one's life; it is the presence of Jesus in one's life. It is through Jesus Christ that one recovers the peace that Adam and Eve had with God before the Fall; it is only in and through Jesus Christ that one acquires peace with others. The word *peace* (ειϛρηψνη, eirhne) occurs eight times in the Book of Ephesians (**1:2; 3:14; 2:15; 2:17** [2 times]; **4:3; 6:15; 6:23**). Paul begins this Epistle with greetings—"Grace and peace" (**1:2**). In this salutation, grace (χαψρϊ, caris) comes first and then peace. As a result of God's grace in and through Jesus, one experiences peace, reconciliation, and wholeness with God (**Isaiah 53:5**). It is because of this Peace that Christians are to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:4**).

The second occurrence of the word *peace*, as stated above, is found in **Ephesians 2:14**—"He himself is our peace." The third count is listed in **2:15** in which Paul calls attention to the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile into one body—"His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." Again, the fourth and fifth uses of the word peace are found in **2:17**. In this verse, Paul

calls attention to Jesus as having come and "preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near." Paul employs the sixth use of the word peace as he admonishes Christians to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**4:3**). As Paul brings his short Epistle to a close, he encourages the believers to put on the armor of God (**6:10-20**), which includes the "gospel of peace" in **6:15.** This "gospel of peace" is also called the "administration of God's grace" (**3:2**). And, finally, Paul says, "Peace to the brothers" (**6:23**).

Mystery of God's Peace Unfolded

Paul, as he seeks to unfold this mystery of God's salvation in and through Jesus, drives home the point that without Jesus one cannot have peace with God. Listen to Paul as he paints in graphic detail the life without Jesus:

> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— [12] remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (**Ephesians 2:11-15**).

If one wishes peace with God, one must accept Jesus as the Savior of the world. When one does not have Christ, one is "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God." How can one have hope and God? Paul's answer is Jesus. Paul follows this terrible picture of what life without Jesus is like with the following words: "For he himself is our peace" (**2:14**). This peace with God can only be found in Jesus the Messiah. One can scarcely read this Epistle without deliberation upon the words of Jesus Himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**). This statement of Jesus is quite revealing. Jesus not only brings peace, He Himself is Peace. For this very reason, Paul stresses that God's salvation is "in Christ" (εςν Χριστώ', en Cristw).

This phrase occurs fourteen times in Ephesians (**1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32**). Again, listen to Paul as he seeks to set forth the place of salvation and the place where peace with God is found. To do this, he employs another phrase, "in him" (εςν αυςψτώ', en autw). Paul employs this unique expression nine times (**1:4, 7, 11, 13; 2:21, 22; 3:12** [two times]**; 4:21**). Paul makes use of other expressions to emphasize Christ as the Peace of God. This "Peace" with God existed in eternity, even before God created Adam. With the coming of Jesus, this "mystery" (μυστηψριον, musthrion) that had been hidden for ages is now revealed (**3:1-6**). This mystery is the coming of Christ. This mystery is about the Logos (Λοψγö, "Word") breaking into another dimension—the sphere of human history. The coming of Jesus corresponds to the coming of the Word (**John 1:1-14**). In Christ, the Word comes from the other side. The Word made flesh is essentially the mystery of God (**Colossians 2:2**). Christians should stand in awe as they reflect upon this mystery, which says that Christ comes to humanity from beyond the frontier of creaturely existence since He comes to this earth from the side of God.

The word *mystery* occurs seven times in Ephesians (**Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19**) and the expression "administration of God's Grace" is used one time (**3:2**). Whether one speaks of "mystery of his will" (**1:9**), "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (**1:13**), "mystery of Christ" (**3:4**), "this mystery" (**3:6**), "administration of this mystery" (**3:9**), "profound mystery" (**5:32**), "the gospel of peace" (**6:15**), or "the mystery of the gospel" (**6:19**), one addresses one and the same thing—"He himself is our peace" (**2:14**). The word *Gospel* appears five times in this Epistle (**1:13; 3:6, 7; 6:15. 19**). This "gospel of your salvation" in **1:13** is also called "the gospel of peace" in **6:15**. Jesus has solved the problem of relationships with each other in His own person. God's word of peace promised through the prophets is fulfilled through the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary (**1 Peter 2:24**). One can say that Christ is both Peace and Peacemaker.

This "mystery of the gospel" is about Christ who is "our peace." The "mystery" is "Christ" Himself. Paul goes right to the heart of this matter in his Colossian Epistle:

> I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments (**Colossians 2:1-4**).

Again, one recalls the words of Paul as he speaks of peace between God and the human race: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (**1:19-20**). Paul desired the Colossians to have the "full riches of complete understanding" of this "mystery of God." It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Ephesians: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (**Ephesians 1:18-19**). In the Gospel of God, one witnesses the drama of God's mighty act as deliverer from estrangement and restoration of fellowship with Himself.

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is about the Person of the Mediator. The Mediator must be understood as an act of God's grace. It is in Him and only in Him that God does something to humanity. The coming of Jesus to the human race in revelation and redemption is an act of God's sovereign will. As one studies the Epistles of Paul, one observes that the predominant message is about Christ's coming down, the sending of His Son, His taking on Himself the form of a servant for sinful humanity, His suffering, His death, and His rising again for justification for those who put their trust in Him for salvation. It is in the incarnation that God reveals Himself as the God who approaches men and women in their lost condition. Individuals who want peace can only find peace in one's acceptance of Christ as the Savior of the world. Paul articulates this peace to the Romans as something that can only be found in Him:

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 5:1**).

The word *peace* in **Ephesians 2:14** is about the Prince of Peace that Isaiah (**9:6**) prophesied about seven hundred years before His coming in human flesh (**John 1:14**). One can say that Christianity had a life before its birth (**Genesis 3:15**). This One that is called Jesus is the One who reconciles lost people to God. It is in this same vein that Isaiah also predicts: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (**Isaiah 49:6**). Again, Isaiah proclaims: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (**53:5**). One can say that the Gospel is the Good News that God is creating a new world in which peace dwells. This peace can only be found in the One who became flesh.

To illustrate this truth that peace is given only to those who put their trust in Jesus as Savior, one turns to the Book of Luke for the teaching that peace is limited to those who believe in His Son Jesus. Luke writes: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (**Luke 2:14**, NIV). The question that confronts one is: on whom does His favor rest? The RSV translates: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" Again, the question is: "with whom is he pleased? On the other hand, the KJV reads: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." According to the NIV and the RSV, God's favor only rests upon those who listen to His Son. The KJV renders this verse as if peace is generic. The KJV does not convey the same concept as the NIV or the RSV. The difference in the KJV from the other two translations hinges upon one Greek word that is translated as either "good will" (nominative—ευζδοκιψα, eudokia) or "on whom his favor rest" (genitive—ευζδοκιψά, eudokias). Verlyn Verbrugge writes with insight:

> The Greek manuscripts used to translate the KJV contain ευζδοκιψα (nominative), whereas the older manuscripts used to translate the modern versions contain ευζψζδοκιψά (genitive)—literally translated, "of good will" or "characterized by [God's] good pleasure." In other words, the peace that the angels sang that belonged to the earth as a result of the birth of Christ is not a generic, worldwide peace for all humankind, but a peace limited to those who obtain favor with God by believing in his Son Jesus (see Romans 5:1). What a difference a single letter can make in the meaning of the text![2]

This interpretation by Verbrugge also upholds Paul's point of view about salvation in the first chapter of Ephesians. In Paul's comments, he strips away all extraneous matter and goes right to the very core of where salvation occurs: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**Ephesians 1:13**). In order for one to be "in Christ," one must hear the Gospel of salvation and believe, not before. If one wishes peace with God, every one must hear the Word of truth and believe that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, namely, the Son of God, the Savior of the world (σωτηψρ του' κοψσμου, swthr tou kosmou).

Paul, as he seeks to grasp the richness of God's grace, calls out: "For he himself is our peace" (**Ephesians 2:14**). Again, Paul puts across the very center of this peace as existing only in Jesus, as he expresses elsewhere in very concrete words: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 5:1**).[3] Jesus enters the world of sinful history in order to redeem. Just a perusal of God's whole revelation reveals God coming down to save sinful men and women. As one reflects upon the Incarnation, one quickly realizes that the cross of Christ and the message of the atonement are the last phases of the Incarnation. One cannot understand the life of Christ if one does not understand His life as culminating in the Cross. God makes "peace through his blood shed on the cross" (**Colossians 1:20**). It is obvious that the death of Jesus was not a tragic defeat; it was a component of God's age-long purpose (mystery) for the deliverance of both men and women from condemnation.

The Cross of Jesus makes it impossible for Christians to take forgiveness lightly. The crucifixion of Jesus is the outcome itself that gives forgiveness its complete weight. In the Cross of Jesus, one witnesses divine holiness and divine love. God Himself has provided the divine safeguard—the Cross of Jesus. God wants to have communion with His creation, but this peace is found only in one's acceptance of Jesus as God's message of free grace. Forgiveness and justification and peace of the sinner can only be found in the suffering Savior (**Isaiah 53**). In order to have peace with God, there must be forgiveness. When one reflects upon his or her guilt, one realizes that guilt is too great to be removed by forgiveness pure and simple, that is to say, God could not just speak: "I forgive you." The Christian doctrine of forgiveness is established upon the Atonement of Jesus. The Atonement for sins is not offered by men and women, but by God Himself. In the Atonement, one observes God descending and running after lost humanity.

God makes peace through the Cross of Jesus. It is in the Cross that one observes God's holiness and God's mercy coming together. In the words of the psalmist, one can also say that "righteousness and peace kiss each other" (**Psalm 85:10**). Deliberation upon the Cross of Jesus causes one to reflect upon the words of Paul to the Galatians: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). As one studies the Book of Ephesians, one should pray that this Scripture would sink into his or her heart and stand fast. The very essence of the Christian faith is to believe that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). One cannot live with God unless one's sins are forgiven. Forgiveness is only found in Jesus. Paul writes with power as he ponders God's grace: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (**Ephesians 1:7**).

Prophecies Concerning the Coming of the Messiah

To understand Jesus as one's Peace in all its fullness and wonder and awe, one must seek to examine the prophets in order to grasp the significance of this mystery that had been kept hidden from the foundation of the world until the Word became flesh (**Ephesians 1: 3-14**). Hopefully, this study will awaken one to the essential need

to fathom the prophetic books in all their richness concerning the coming Messiah. The prophets wrote about this mystery, but they did not understand its completeness and totality. This disclosure by the prophets concerning the coming of God's Son and redemption even astounded the angels. How could God justify sinful humanity? How could God bring about peace between Himself and sinful men and women? Yes, justification for sinful human beings created a problem even for God. How could God be just and justify the sinner at the same time? Paul reveals the dilemma and the answer in his Epistle to Rome. Listen to Paul as he unfolds how God dealt with the problem:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26).

The secret of justification can only be found in the mystery of the Person of Christ. Jesus comes to civilization from beyond the frontier of creaturely existence (**John 1:1-14**); He comes to men and women from the side of God. Since Jesus stands on the other side of the frontier, beyond which only God Himself can stand, then this One, who comes from the other side, is Himself our Prince of Peace. Peter, in his first letter, writes about this salvation that the prophets foretold:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

This salvation was so marvelous that Peter says that the angels desired to stoop low and look into the mystery of how God would justify sinful human beings. The prophets did not know the time or the circumstance to which the Holy Spirit pointed them. Nevertheless, the prophets assert that they had an authoritative divine word to proclaim, a message from God. It was "the word of the Lord that came to Hosea" (**Hosea 1:1**). Again, Jeremiah, in writing his words, said: "The word of the Lord came to him" (**Jeremiah 1:2**). Once more, Peter writes about the One behind the prophetic writings:

> And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day

> dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. [20] Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. [21] For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:19-21**).

Peter is saying that what the prophets wrote did not originate with them. It was not their imagination. What they wrote about lies outside the realm of human knowledge. Even though the prophet is an ordinary man, the prophet is honored by God to receive a word that no man could possibly discover to be the truth by his own efforts. The words of the prophets were distinct in that they received words from the other side, the communication of a divine secret, or mystery. Since this revelation has come from beyond, the other side, this revelation must be received as legitimate. Since this word has come from God, one must listen to it with the knowledge that this word about the One who would put away sin in one day has actually come from God Himself. The Word of God is transcendent; it has come from the other side. In the prophets, God reveals an event that will break into time—God becoming flesh to rescue sinful humanity. In other words, the prophets speak of a day in which the Divine Word is plunged into the current history of the world. Emil Brunner says with clarity and power the place of prophetic revelation when he writes:

> The prophetic revelation points beyond itself to something which is "more than prophetic," and Jesus Christ points back to the prophets as those who stand behind and below Himself. The prophetic word of revelation is thus conceived from both points of view as a provisional message, as a transitional phase, like the first flush of dawn before the sunrise, incomplete in itself. . . . The prophet of the Old Testament had what no one else had or could have unless he were a prophet by vocation; he had a divine word of revelation, whose truth depends wholly upon the fact that it is a word of revelation; this "word" can never be transferred to the sphere of general truth without a complete distortion of its original meaning. Hence because he alone—not in virtue of that that which he is in himself, but in virtue of the fact that he is the chosen mouthpiece—has this word, the prophet stands between God and man as a new fact.[4]

What do you think about the Old Testament? What do you think about the prophetic writings? What did Paul imply in his exhortation to Timothy concerning the inspiration of the Old Testament in **2 Timothy 3:14-17**? Do you read the Old Testament? Unfortunately, within the community of the redeemed, the study of the Old Testament is often treated as something that is antiquated. The prophets and their writings are not studied with a great deal of attention or passion, especially within some segments of the Churches of Christ. Yet, Jesus took the time to explain to His disciples the Messianic prophecies found in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (Psalms) [**Luke 24:44-49**). It is also in this identical frame of mind that Paul reminded Timothy to study the Old Testament (**2 Timothy 3:15-17**). Christians should take the prophets seriously, because they spoke about the coming of the Messiah. The prophets do not speak in their own names, but in the name of God. A prophet is one who has an authoritative divine word to proclaim, a message from God Himself.

The truths concerning the coming of the Messiah go beyond religious or ethical truths. In other words, the truths concerning the Messiah could not have been known otherwise than through God's revelation. Neither men nor women could have discovered these truths about the Messiah on their own, because the content of the Messianic prophesies is a divine mystery, a mystery that lies outside the realm of human knowledge and understanding. The prophets never write on their own authority, but rather by the authority of God. The prophet considered it his duty to disclose the divine secret that is disclosed to him. The prophet only possesses the Word; he is not the Word itself. The prophets foretold about the Word, which is Jesus. They foretold the Good News about God's coming salvation in which He would do away with sin in one day—the Atonement of Christ upon Calvary (**Zechariah 3:8-9**). If one wishes peace with God, it can only be through the Prince of Peace—Jesus. This Gospel was preached even to Abraham (**Galatians 3:8**). What was preached to Abraham? It was the Gospel! What is the Gospel? Paul explains it in verse four of Galatians the first chapter: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age."

A. M. Ramsay writes with influence as he speaks of the true nature of the Gospel, a Gospel which the prophets foretold: "Jesus Christ came not only to preach a Gospel but to be a Gospel, and He is the Gospel of God in all that He did for the deliverance of mankind."[5] Jesus is the very heart of God's Gospel because it is in His Person that God unites the human and the divine natures. It is in Him that one finds peace, because Jesus is the Prince of Peace (<olv* rc^, c^r v*lom). Before the creation of the universe (**Genesis 1:1**), the Trinity decreed that One would become flesh in order to redeem sinful humanity. Paul pens the following words as he seeks to capture the richness of God's grace: " For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he[a] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (**Ephesians 1:4-5**). If one wishes to really understand this One that Paul refers to as "He himself is our peace," one needs to turn to the Old Testament in order to more fully grasp the significance of what it is that God accomplished for lost people.

Unfolding the Mystery of the Ages

Paul, as he seeks to unfold this mystery of God's will, relies upon the "foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (**2:20,** see also **Isaiah 28:16)**). As stated above, one quickly grasps from the study of the prophets that Christianity had a history before its actual history.[6] Even though Paul does not discuss the Messianic prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Book of Ephesians, nevertheless, he calls attention to God's household as resting upon the foundation of the prophets (**2:20**). Paul, in the Book of Ephesians, unfolds the prophecies as having fulfillment in Jesus, without discussing the prophecies themselves. The study of the prophecies in the Old Testament will enhance one's appreciation for God's love and one's consciousness of who Jesus is and one's awareness of the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies. What did Jesus think about the study of the prophets? What did He think about the Writings (the third division of the Old Testament, sometimes called the Psalms)? What did He think about the first five books of the Old Testament called the Law of Moses? Luke gives his readers an insight as to the authority of the Old Testament writings in seeking to understand the ministry and mission of Jesus. Jesus, after His resurrection, addresses the Messianic

prophecies in order that His disciples might understand what had happened in His crucifixion:

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things (**Luke 24:44-48**).

Jesus unfolds the prophecies about Himself as foretold in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Since Genesis is one of the books of Moses, one cannot help but observes the first reference to the coming of the Messiah in **Genesis 3:15**: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring[a] and hers; he will crush[b] your head, and you will strike his heel." Paul, so it seems, makes brief mention of this prophecy in the Book of Romans as he predicts the downfall of Jerusalem in the near future: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (**16:20**). In conclusion to Romans, Paul calls attention to this Gospel that God had long ago foretold through His prophets, prior to the coming of Christ, and is now, in Paul's day, continuing to unfold this mystery through His prophets of the first century:

> Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, [26] but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— [27] to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (**Romans 16:25-27**).

Christians have long recognized that in the "seed (ur~z#, z#r^u, "seed") of the woman" that one witnesses the first words of the covenant of grace spoken of by Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**).[7] It is also in the "seed of the woman" that one also recognizes that the promised seed of the woman was particularized into the seed of Abraham (**Genesis 22:17-19**). Paul reveals to the Galatians the meaning of **Genesis 22:17-19** as he seeks to set forth the true meaning of the Gospel:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."[a] [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**Galatians 3:6-9**).

God said to Abraham: "through your offspring[b] (;u&r+z^b=, b=z^r&I*, "by your seed") all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (**Genesis 22:18**). Paul, in his explanation about Abraham's "offspring," does not stop abruptly, leaving one hanging in the air as to his meaning. But rather, he

continues to identify this "seed" as centering in and around just one person, namely Jesus: "The promises were spoken to Abraham[8] and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,'[a] meaning one person, who is Christ" (**Galatians 3:16**). **Genesis 3:15** is the inauguration of God's grace. This is the first recorded reference concerning salvation from sin for men and women. God spoke precisely about Christ in His redemptive role just as he later spoke of Christ in His reference to Abraham's seed. The "seed of the woman" and Abraham's "seed" signified the coming One, namely, Christ.

As stated above, the "seed of the woman" was personalized in the seed of Abraham in whom the families of the earth would be blessed. One can also say that Jesus was the seed of Isaac[9] (**26:4**) and the seed of Jacob[10] (**28:10-14**). Out of Jacob would come the One from whom "peace" for the nations would emerge—peace between God and humanity. Again, Moses[11] amplifies the prophecy to Jacob in **28:10-14** concerning this One who would bless all nations. This strengthening of this prophecy is given in **Genesis 49**. In context, this prophecy relates to Jacob and his children. In this prophecy, Jacob centers in on one of the tribes through whom the Messiah would come—the tribe of Judah. Jacob says to his son Judah: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs[c] and the obedience of the nations is his" (**Genesis 49:10**). The KJV translates: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*."

"Until Shiloh come" (hl)yv!, v!,l)h) is a prophecy relating to the Messiah.[12] Judah is specific concerning a descendant of his reigning as king and that the royal scepter would not depart from between his feet until "Shiloh" comes.[13] That is to say, "He to whom it belongs." The whole passage would be unintelligible if Shiloh is not a person to whom the people (<yM!u^, u^M!,m, "peoples") gather for obedience. Ezekiel (593 BC) was acquainted with this Messianic prophecy in **Genesis 49:10**, and, thus, he tells Zedekiah, the profane and wicked king of Judah, to take off his crown. This crown would not be restored until the One comes to whom it belongs:

> Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do—because you have done this, you will be taken captive. [25]O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, [26] this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. [27] A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it' (**Ezekiel 21:24-27**).

Surely Ezekiel was up to date with **Genesis 3:15** as well as **Genesis 22:18**. Ezekiel must have known that Jesus was covenantally prophesied in **3:15**, **22:17-18**, and **49:10**. Without doubt, Ezekiel must have read about Jesus in **Isaiah 7:14, 9:6**, and **53:1**, Scriptures that deal with Jesus' deification. John, the apostle, confirms the words of Ezekiel (**21:24-27**) as he writes in the Book of Revelation (ca. AD 68) about this One to whom it belongs: " The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud

voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (**Revelation 11:15**).

Another clue to this identification of the time of the coming of Shiloh is Jacob's words in **49:1**: "Then Jacob called for his sons and said: 'Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.'" The KJV renders this verse: "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that* which shall befall you in the last days." The "last days" (<ym!!Y`h^ tyr]j&a^B=, B+a^j&r!,t h^Y*m!,<, "in coming of the days") signifies the days of the Messiah. Daniel also employs "In the last days" in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the future. According to Daniel, God gave Nebuchadnezzar the dream in order to reveal to him a vision of what would happen in the future. In this dream, Daniel reveals four world empires. In the fourth empire, Daniel discloses that the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will endure forever: "And in the days[m] of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (**Daniel 2:44**).

In describing the time frame of this spiritual kingdom, Daniel says, " but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come" (<ym!!Y`h^ tyr]j&a^B=, B+a^j&r!,t h^Y*m!,<, "in coming of the days") [**2:28**]. The KJV renders this verse: "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Daniel' expression "in days to come" is the same phrase in **Genesis 49:1**. Both Isaiah (**2:2**) and Micah (**1:1**) foretell about the coming of the Messianic kingdom with the same expression ("In the last days). Pay attention to the words of Micah (735 BC) concerning the coming of the kingdom of God:

> **In the last days** the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. [2] Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. [3] He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (**Micah 4:1-3**).

Isaiah (739 BC) writes:

> **In the last days** the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. [3] Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. [4] He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not

take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (**Isaiah 2:1-4**).

Both Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries and spoke of the Lord's temple being established "in the last days." Joel (835 BC) also writes about the outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days (**Joel 2:28-32**). Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, over eight hundred years later, referred to this prophecy:

> These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16] No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] "'**In the last days**, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'[a] These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16] No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] "'**In the last days**, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'[a] (**Acts 2:15-21**).

Peter identifies the "last days" as having reference to the coming of Jesus. With just a simple perusal of the New Testament writings, one immediately detects that Jesus believed Himself to be the absolute and ultimate incarnation of that messianic image and anticipation that the prophets wrote about. For example, Jesus applies **Psalm 110:1** to Himself (**Matthew22: 41-45**), which concerns David calling Jesus Lord. Also, Jesus, while in Nazareth, stood up in the synagogue and read from **Isaiah 61:1-2** and applied this to Himself (**Luke 4:17-21**), which prophecy foretold Jesus' ministry to the poor and the preaching of the Good News about God's covenant of grace. Once more, **Isaiah 53:12** speaks of Jesus as being numbered with the transgressors, yet Jesus cites this Scripture as having its fulfillment in Him (**Luke 22:37**).

Yes, Jesus is that Shiloh, or Prince of Peace, spoken of by Isaiah (**9:6**). Following the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, God called three prophets to address the present condition of Israel as well as the end times (last days)—Haggai (520 BC), Zechariah (520 BC), and Malachi (433 BC). Haggai, for instance, spoke of the time when "the desired of all nations will come" and fill the house with glory (**Haggai 2:7-9**). In the Book of Zechariah, God said to Joshua: "Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to

come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch (jm^x#, x#m^h)" (**Zechariah 3:8**). Once again, God said:

> Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. [13] It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two (**6:12-13**).

Within these words to Joshua, one discovers a messianic overtone in reference to the "Branch," the name by which God would call Him. Following this prediction, Zechariah again pens another messianic prophecy: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king[a] comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (**9:9**). Yet another time, Zechariah identifies this One as the coming Messiah: "I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver" (**11:12**). And finally, but not the least of the prophecies, Zechariah foretells the crucifixion of the Branch:

> And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit[a] of grace and supplication. They will look on[b] me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (**12:10**).

The Branch (jm^x#, x#m^h) spoken of in **Zechariah 3:8** is none other than the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53**, the "one who bore the sin of many" (**53:12**). One hundred years earlier, Jeremiah (627 BC) spoke of the "righteous Branch" whereby Judah and Israel will live in safety. Observe the words of the Holy Spirit as he spoke through Jeremiah:

> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David[a] a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:5-6**).

"This is the name by which he will be called" identifies the "righteous Branch" as "The Lord Our Righteousness." One hundred years later, **Zechariah** (520 BC) speaks of the Branch in **6:12** in which he says that His name is "Branch":

> Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. [13] It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

Isaiah (739 BC), approximately two hundred years before Zechariah, following his Messianic prediction concerning the kingdom of Christ (**2:1-4**), also spoke of the Branch of the Lord: "In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (**Isaiah 4:2**). The Branch of the Lord (ho*hy+ jm^x#, x#m^j y+ho*h, "Branch of Yahweh") refers to the divine nature of this coming Ruler. It is also in this same vein that Micah, seven hundred years before the birth of the Messiah, prophesied concerning His birthplace: " "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small

among the clans[b] of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins[c] are from of old, from ancient times[d]" (**Micah 5:2**).

The utterance itself provides ample evidence for viewing this Scripture as Messianic. Seven hundred years after this prophecy, the chief priest and the teachers of the Law so understood when they were questioned by Herod concerning the news floating around Jerusalem about one born king of the Jews (**Matthew 2:1-6**). Even though the religious leaders did not accept the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of this Messianic prophecy, nevertheless, they understood the implications of **Micah 5:2**.[14] Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, was fully aware of the deplorable conditions among his countrymen. Through the Holy Spirit, he condemned the political leaders in **3:1-4** and the religious leaders in **3:5-8**. Then in **3:9-12**, he pronounces judgment upon the nation, especially upon Jerusalem. Still, in spite of God's judgment, he predicts the "last days" concerning the coming of the Messiah (**4:1-3**). Following this Messianic prediction about the coming of God's kingdom, he again paints a rather dismal picture of the calamity about to fall upon Jerusalem (**4:9-10**). Yet again, he, in almost an abrupt manner, turns his attention to the little town of Bethlehem from which the future deliverer of the nations would come forth (**5:2**).

Matthew cites this Scripture as Messianic (**2:6**). What does "out of you will come for me" mean? The expression ax@y} yl! (l!, y@x@) indicates that the Messiah performs an exclusive and very important share in the development of God's plan of rescue from condemnation (see also **Daniel 9:24-27**). Again, what does 'whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" signify? The KJV renders this verse: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting[a]. "From of old" is from the Hebrew word <d\q# (q#d#m), which indicates ancient times. The phrase "from everlasting" is from the Hebrew word <l*ou (uol*m), which indicate eternity as well as ancient times. After identification of the birth town of the Messiah, Micah says that a ruler (lv@om, mov@l, "a Ruler") will go out for me in Israel and His proceedings from ancient times from the days of eternity. David Cooper captures, so it seems, the true interpretation of this prophecy:

> Irrespective of the choice of definition in this oracle, the statement, "whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting," assumes the preexistence of this ruler before his appearance in Bethlehem.[15]

Isaiah had already told of His virgin birth (**Isaiah 7:14**). It was left for Micah to name the place (**Micah 5:2**). Not only did Micah name the place, but he also calls attention to His existence prior to His birth in Bethlehem. Over seven hundred years after this prophecy about His eternity, Jesus entered into controversy with the religious leaders by asserting that "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (**John 8:56**). The Jews were flabbergasted at this saying: "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham." (Abraham was born in 2166 BC) [**8:57**]. Jesus then dropped a bombshell by asserting: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am" (**8:58**). Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed: "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**17:5**). These sayings of Jesus only confirm what John writes at the beginning of his Gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made

by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life; and the life was the light of men (**1:1-4**).

CONCLUSION

Do you have peace with God? Do you want peace? Do you want freedom from sin and guilt? If so, Jesus is the answer to the sin problem. In conclusion to this study—Jesus Is Our Prince of Peace—it is appropriate, once more, to briefly reflect upon the words of Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**John 8:12**). In the sequence of this same discourse, Jesus lays out the distinction between Himself and the Pharisees: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**). But He does not stop with this piercing statement, but He continues His remarks by telling them about His crucifixion: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be" (**8:28**).

If one wants freedom from condemnation and peace with God, one can only experience this relationship of peace with God in and through Jesus Christ. Listen to Jesus as He sets forth this truth: "If you hold to my teaching (λοψγω' τω' εμω', logw tw emw, "my word"), you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). The teaching is that Jesus is from above and the savior of the world. Jesus follows up this announcement with reference to Himself: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (**8:36**). Earlier, John the Baptist gives his testimony about this One from above:

> The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. [32] He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. [33] The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. [34] For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God[c] gives the Spirit without limit. [35] The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. [36] Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him"[d](**John 3:31-36**).

In this same chapter, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus these words: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (**3:13**). How can one escape the wrath of God? Paul develops this subject in Romans. Listen to Paul as he explains how one escapes God's wrath and finds peace: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we[b] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (**Romans 5:1-2**). "If one wishes peace with God, this peace can only be found in the One who is the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the centerpiece of history (**14:6**). He is the single way to God. This is the very reason that Paul cries out: "He Himself is our peace" (**Ephesians 2:14**). The One who existed from all eternity is the One that Paul, too, speaks of as "our Peace." It is in this regard that Charles L. Feinberg's comments about **Micah 5:2** are well worth citing:

> The Ruler comes forth from Bethlehem in time, but He is not circumscribed by time. His goings forth have been from old, from everlasting. These goings forth were in creation, in His appearances to the patriarchs, and throughout the Old Testament history of redemption. The phrases of this text are the strongest possible statement of infinite duration in the Hebrew language (Ps 90:2; Pr 8:22-23). The preexistence of the Messiah is being taught here, as well as His active participation in ancient times in the purpose of God.[16]

As the loving God, God wishes to draw everyone to Himself. It is His mercy that sends His Son to die for the sins of the world. God's assault upon the world is Jesus Christ. This assault upon the world is what the atonement is all about—peace with God. What does the Cross and the Atonement mean? It means acceptance with God and eternal life and peace. The reality of God's wrath is seen in both the Atonement and the Resurrection of His Son Jesus. God's love and His peace are known only in and through His Son. One receives God's peace at the place of horror—the Cross. Jesus is this bridge between God and humanity.

It is in Jesus that the love of God breaks through His wrath. The Cross remains the sign of this Peace. It is only in the coming of Jesus that the barriers that are opposed to forgiveness are torn down. The picture of salvation is this: God descends and runs after men and women. If one wishes God's Peace, this peace can only be found in the One who is the Prince of Peace. It is only in Christ that the injury caused by the Fall has been made good. This truth is the center of the Christian Faith—"He Himself is our Peace." Listen once more to the words of Jesus: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,-you will indeed die in your sins" (**John 8:23-24**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

a Or *let us*

[2] Verlyn Verbrugge, "Exegetical Insight" in William Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 45.

a Or *let us*

[3] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[4] Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (1934, London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 222.

[5] A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (1945, reprint, London: Fontana Books, 1962), 10-11.

a 4,5 Or *sight in love. He*

[6] See David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory: Christ in the Old Testament*, (1886: reprint, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 1. I am indebted to David Baron for his insight and comments on the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. I have rephrased many of his comments in order to avoid so many footnotes.

a Or *seed*

b Or *strike*

[7] For an excellent study on the "seed of the woman," see David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person* (Los Angeles, California: Biblical Research Society, 1933), 25-36.

a Gen. 15:6

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

b Or *seed*

[8] Abraham's date of birth: 2166 BC. For a detailed explanation of biblical chronology for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, see Dallas Burdette, "What Is Liberalism, [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 5 May 2004) located under the caption Sermons and Essays and then under Unity in Diversity.

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

[9] Isaac's date of birth: 2066 BC

[10] Jacob's date of birth: 2006 BC.

[11] Moses' date of birth: 1526 BC.

c Or *until Shiloh comes*; or *until he comes to whom tribute belongs*

[12] For a detailed analysis of this prophecy (Genesis 49:10), see David Copper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person*, 45-54.

[13] The word *Shiloh* is spelled three different ways in the Old Testament. It is spelled olv! (v!lo), three times olyv! (v!,lo), and one time hOyv! (v!,Oh), which occurs in **Genesis 49:10**.

m the days: Chaldee their days

a Joel 2:28-32

a Joel 2:28-32

a Or *King*

a Or *the Spirit*

b Or *to*

a Or *up from David~s line*

b Or *rulers*

c Hebrew *goings out*

d Or *from days of eternity*

[14] For an excellent study on this passage (**Micah 5:2**), one should consult Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus Divine Messiah: The New and Old Testament Witness* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 128-134.

a everlasting: Heb. the days of eternity

[15] David Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person*, 200.

c Greek *he*

d Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 30.

a Or *let us*

b Or *let us*

[16] Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (1948, Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 173.

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

Life Before Rebirth
Ephesians 2:1-3

Thrust Statement: **Life before rebirth is a life filled with self-centeredness.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 2:1-3**

INTRODUCTION

As one approaches the second chapter of Ephesians, one is immediately confronted with the dilemma of sinful humanity and God's initiative in rescuing sinful men and women from condemnation. In chapter one, Paul unfolds the mystery (μυστηψριον, musthrion) of God concerning how He would accomplish salvation for lost men and women. For Paul, Jesus is God's answer to the sin problem. Paul employs the prepositional phrase "in Christ" (εςν Χριστώ', en Cristw) six times in the first chapter. This same phrase is utilized fourteen times in this Book. Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals Jesus as God's Way of salvation. To preach Jesus is to proclaim salvation through His name. In the second chapter of Ephesians, one observes that to preach Christ is to preach the Cross (**2:16**). This Book displays the mighty acts of God in redemption. This understanding of God's powerful undertaking of salvation in Christ was the driving force of the early mission of the Church. This same mindset should also be the motivating strength of missions within the Body of Christ today.

One cannot help but observe that in preaching Christ that the main objective is to call men and women to faith in Him. Paul unfolds the mystery of God by calling attention to the truth that salvation is through His Person and work. For preaching to be biblical, it must be Christo-centric, that is to say, Christ centered. If preaching is not Christ centered, it is not biblical. The purpose of the written Word—Book of Ephesians, for example—is to lead individuals to the Word made flesh (**John 1:1-14**). Preaching is essentially the proclamation of the Good News about Jesus as God's Way of salvation through faith in Him. If preaching is to be true preaching, one must

emphasize the action of the Cross in redemption (**Ephesians 2:16**). As one reflects upon the Cross, one must ask himself or herself: am I as apprehended by the Crucified and Risen Lord as was Paul? Has this finished work of Christ changed my life (**John 19:30**)?

LIFE BEFORE REGENERATION

In one's approach to the second chapter of Ephesian, one is cognizant that the preaching of the Gospel is about Good News, not views. It is the proclamation of Good News, not the issues, which divides so many Christians today. In the Gospel, one witnesses the creative work of God in redemption. Paul begins this second chapter with comments about the recipients of this Epistle: "As for you (υΣμα̈, Jumas), you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (**Ephesians 2:1**).[1] Paul reveals that the recipients of this Epistle were formerly unbelievers and were dead in "transgressions and sins." But Paul also calls attention to the Gospel of God's grace, the means of their resurrection from the dead (**2:4-10**). The words "It is by grace you have been saved through faith" should sink deep into one's heart, especially as one considers one's life before rebirth.

As one seeks to unfold the words of Paul in this chapter, one observes that this chapter naturally falls into two segments—**2:1-10** and **2:11-22**. An analysis of these two subdivision reveals that there are close parallelisms within the two units. In both groupings, Paul paints a rather dismal picture of humanity before rebirth. In both pieces, he draws a portrait of the predicament of individuals without God (**2:1-3; 2:11-12**). One of the key words that draws attention to this partition is the conjunction δεψ (de) found in **2:4** and **2:13**. With this conjunction "de" in **2:4** and **2:13**, Paul does not leave individuals without hope. In **2:1-3**, Paul sketches an awful depiction of one without God, but he does not leave the scenario without giving the brighter side: " But (δεψ, de) because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (**2:4-5**).

In the second component of this chapter (**2:11-22**), Paul, again, describes hope for one who was formerly without God and without Christ. "But (δεψ, de) now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (**2:13**). Paul actually draws attention to their former status (far away) as well as to their new status (near) with the words "But now" (νυνιΨ δεψ, nuni de). "But now" is Paul's response in the Book of Romans after he explains how the Law of God silences every individual (**Romans 3:21-24**). "But now" (ΝυνιΨ δεψ Nuni de) is the heart of the Gospel of Christ.[2] This "but now" is how faith answers the indictment of the Law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—"but now." No man ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of his holy law. Well, is there optimism for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The Apostle answers these questions. How? "But now!" Yes, God's grace provides the righteousness His law demands. The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for man in Christ Jesus. "But now" is man's defense against the curse of God's Law. This is the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel tells of *righteousness* from God, *righteousness* provided by God, *in* and *through* our Lord Jesus Christ (**3:24**). Jesus has satisfied the Law of God on man's behalf. He fulfilled the Law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is *external* to man, a righteousness that is *alien* to man, a righteousness that is *passive* to man, a righteousness that is *imputed* to man.[3] This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it.[4] But God unfolds it and presents it on display in the Gospel of his crucified Son; Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the Gospel. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals His way of redeeming sinners and upholding His holiness. Paul poignantly captures this truth when he pens:

> God presented him a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

This author, Dallas Burdette, has sought to lay stress on the conjunction "de" in order to call attention to the rhetorical effect of canceling out what precedes it. God steps in to accomplish redemption. For Paul, the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah is a movement from God to humanity. As one reflects upon the Cross of Christ, one is conscious that this Cross is a manifestation of both God's holiness and God's love for degenerate men and women. Paul understood that it is God who takes the initiative—He Himself comes in and through His Son. The Cross of Jesus means that He really comes to sinful humanity. In the coming of Jesus, one witnesses the barriers destroyed that stood against God's forgiveness. In this second chapter of Ephesians, Paul stresses that salvation is not by works, but rather by faith in Jesus Christ. In **Ephesians 2:1-10**, Paul summarizes what it really means to be "in Christ."

ONE'S ONLY HOPE OF ESCAPE FROM CONDEMNATION: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

As mentioned above, the structure of this pericope (unit) sets forth the "before" (far away) and the "after" (near) of salvation. In other words, the "before" is described in **verses 1-3** and the "after" in **verses 4-10**. Prior to God's operation, the Gentiles "were dead" in their "transgressions and sins" (**2:1**). Paul also emphasizes this again in **2:5** when he writes that they "were dead in transgressions." This double reference to their "before" condition is a means of highlighting the significance of God's interference. These individuals (Gentiles) have experienced the same miracle manifested in the life of Christ—raised from the dead (**2:5**). Just as in the Crucifixion, Jesus was dead and brought back to life, so Paul is saying that they too were dead and made alive with Christ (**2:5-6**). In the life of Christ, one witnesses God descending and running after individuals who were "dead" in transgressions and sins.

In this short Epistle, especially in **verses 5** and **8** of **chapter two**, Paul, in miniature form, sets forth justification by faith. Paul cries out: "It is by grace you have been saved" (**2:5**). Once more, he seeks to drive home the point of justification by faith by repeating what he said in **verse 5**: "For it is by grace you have been saved through

faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (**2:8-9**). Unlike Galatians and Romans, he does not spell out justification by faith in detail. In this chapter, Paul underscores that salvation is not one's own doing; it is in the finished work of Christ. Forgiveness can only take place through a Divine act—the Cross of Jesus (**2:16**). It is in the Cross that God makes known His holiness and His love at the same time. It is only in the Cross that men and women become conscious of what it is that separates them from God. In this forceful Epistle, Paul highlights the Cross as the Divine act of reconciliation. At the Cross, the pride of both men and women are broken. Paul is simply saying in **verses 5** and **8** of **chapter two** that salvation is something beyond the power of humanity to achieve—"it is by grace." In the Book of Ephesians, as stated earlier, Paul details the characteristics of the life before rebirth. One can hardly read **Ephesians 4:17—5:20** without a consciousness that salvation can only be by grace through faith.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE BEFORE REGENERATION

It is in and through Jesus that individuals participate in the mystery that God had kept hidden from the foundation of the world (**3:9**). The "you" (υΣμά, Jumas) in **2:1** refers to the recipients in **2:11**—Gentiles (ε[θνη, eqnh). Just a laid-back reading of this chapter reveals that life without Christ is death. On the other hand, Paul elaborates on redemption as being in Christ. For Paul, if one belongs to Christ, he or she belongs to Him in eternity (**1:3-14**). When one is in Christ, one belongs to the Church, which is the community of Christ (**1:22-23**). This community is destined for eternity; eternal life is promised to those who believe (**1:13-14**). The Church is the community of God founded upon love for those who were dead in "transgressions and sins" (**2:1**).

Transgressions

In **2:1**, two words jump out at the reader—*transgressions* and *sins*. Is there a distinction between the two words? The word *transgression* is from the Greek word παραψπτωμα (paraptwma), which seems to convey the idea of one deliberately breaking a known law. In other words, the Greek word paraptwma is employed in the sense of intended violation of that which is right. This mindset produces, as a general rule, guilt, and this guilt is associated with forgiveness in and through Jesus (see **Matthew 6:14, 15**; **Ephesians 1:7**; **Colossians 2:13**). Paul utilizes this word three times in Ephesians (**1:7; 2:1, 5**). A classic example of this type rebellion is found in **Romans 1:18-32**. Paul says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (**1:21**).

This word *transgression* literally means to slip or fall. It is used of an individual losing one's way and straying from the right road. It is utilized of a person who fails to grasp and slips away from the truth. To trespass is to take the wrong way; it is to miss the truth that one should have known. This word *transgression* slaps everyone in the face. No one has reached the goal that he or she knows to be right. How many have reached the intended goal of moral behavior that brings honor and glory to God? When one analyzes his or her external behavior, one can only stand in silence and pray, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." How often have you deliberately chosen the wrong road even when you knew the right road, or course of action to take?

Sins

Not only were the Gentiles dead in transgressions (deliberate violation of God's Law), but also they were dead in sin (αΣμαρτιψα, Jamartia); they had missed the mark. Paul paints a picture of things done and things left undone, which dilemma is still true. The word *sin* conveys the idea of one shooting an arrow at a target and missing. Sin is the failure of men and women to hit the target of life. This is the reason that sin is so universal; everyone has failed to hit the target of life. In the words of Paul: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). Sin destroys both men and women. When you do wrong, does your conscience bother you? Yes, sin does something to a person. William Barclay correctly says that sin kills the will of men and women to do what is right:

> Once a thing becomes a habit it is not far from being a necessity. When a man has allowed some habit, some indulgence, some forbidden practice to master him, he becomes its slave. As the old saying has it, "Sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny."[5]

Yet, in spite of humanities transgressions and sins, God, says Paul, gains the victory over sin through the Gospel, which is about Jesus rescuing individuals from sin (**Galatians 1:4**). Paul informs Timothy about the Gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus as the victory over the troubles of both men and women:

> So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, [9] who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, [10] but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. [11] And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. [12] That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (**2 Timothy 1:8-12**).

Are you still living in "transgressions and sins" as a part of the Body of Christ? What kind of life are you living today? Are you still walking in your former way of life? Do you still manifest the same ungodly characteristics that dominated your life before regeneration? Or are you walking according to your new life in Christ Jesus? Paul calls awareness to their way of life prior to conversion and to their way of life after conversion. Listen to Paul as he paints a graphic portrait of life before the new birth:

> Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires[a] of

the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (**Ephesians 2:1-3**). [6]

Behavior Before Rebirth in 4:17—5:20

Before one's regeneration, one allows Satan to take over his or her life. In other words, life before resurrection with Jesus is a life that has taken sides against God. This life before the new start is the life that Paul focuses on in **2:1-3**. "You walked" (περιεποτηψσατε, periepothsate, "you used to live," NIV) is a Hebraism for one's lifestyle (conduct). In **2:1-3**, Paul analyzes life before the new beginning in Jesus Christ; but in **2:4-10**, he discusses life after renewal. Paul's description of their former way of life is described as "children of disobedience" (KJV). This expression ("children of disobedience," υιΣö τη' αςπειθειψä, Juios ths apeiqeias, "sons of disobedience") is a Semitism suggesting unethical and unruly subjects. Paul's paints a rather gruesome picture of life outside the Body of Christ (**4:17—5:20**). Instead of the negative influences that dominated one's life before regeneration, Paul, in this same pericope, admonishes the Gentiles to live as children of light (see also **2:10**). The performance of Christians must not and cannot be the same as their character prior to redemption. He writes a description of their condition without God with penetrating words:

> This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, [18] Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness[e] of their heart: [19] Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (**4:17-19**).

In these verses, Paul describes the mindset of "sons of disobedience." In their darkened state, Paul explains their decadent behavior: "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature[a] and following its desires and thoughts" (**2:3**). The KJV renders this verse: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires[a] of the flesh and of the mind." The word *conversation* is the Greek word αςναστρεψφω (anastrefw), which means, "to conduct one's life" or "act." Paul employs it in a figurative sense of the practice of certain things. In other words, at one time, they lived lives selfishly like the rest of the world, but now they are to live lives that honor God, lives that are appropriate for fellowship with God. Paul uses the pronoun "we" (ηΣμει', Jhmeis) to show that the behavior just described included both Jews as well as Gentiles.

The word "cravings" or "lust" (KJV) is from the Greek word εςπιθυμιψα (epiqumia), which, in this verse, speaks of the evil desires and passions of humanity. This "lust" is revealed in one's sinful nature and expressed in sexual, moral, and ethical rebellion against God. In Paul's writings, this word always carries an uncomplimentary sense. For example, Paul employs this word "lust" in **Titus 3:3**: "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions (εςπιθυμιψαï, epiqumiais) and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." Again, Paul utilizes this word "lust" in **Romans 1:24**:

"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires (εξπιθυμιψαϊ, epiqumiais) of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another." Pay attention to Paul as he catalogs the sinful desires, or lust of the flesh:

> They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. [26] Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. [27] In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. [28] Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. [29] They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; [31] they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (**1:25-32**).

This description of the "lust of their own hearts" (KJV) is the conduct that Paul enumerates in **Ephesians 2:1-3** and **4:17—5:20**. In this section of Scripture (**Romans 1:25-32**), Paul describes a life without God as a life characterized by disobedience—a life that leads to disaster. Today, there is a great deal of talk about the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality and lesbianism. Is it right or is it wrong? Paul goes right to the heart of the matter and condemns this kind of sexual behavior. He says, as cited above, that

> Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. [27] In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (**1:26-27**).

When one departs from biblical faith, the world presents a dark portrait of sinful humanity. One cannot participate in these kinds of immoral acts and expect to go to heaven. When one becomes a Christian, he or she dies to sin. If one is guilty, one must repent of such behavior and change; one must put off their grave clothes. One can confess the Gospel or deny the Gospel through one's ethical behavior. Paul, in all his epistles presses home the necessity of right conduct that brings honor to the Gospel. Paul writes rather pointedly to the Corinthians about unethical conduct that does not glorify God:

> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders [10] nor thieves nor the greedy

> nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**).

Who are the wicked? It is not just "male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders"; it also refers to thieves, greedy individuals, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, and so on. What about excessive drinking? If one is a drunkard, one must change his or her lifestyle, otherwise one will not inherit the kingdom of God. Can drunkards be saved? Yes! If one is a drug pusher or drug addict, one cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Can individuals with these habits be saved? Yes! God demands repentance and fruits that portray repentance. Can slanderers be saved? Of course! Can homosexuals be saved? Sure! Can drug addicts be saved? Undisputable! Can drug pushers be saved? Guaranteed! Can husband who mistreat their wives be saved? Absolutely! Can wives who mistreat their husbands be saved? Positively! But wicked behavior must change. One hears the words of Jesus to the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years: "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (**John 5:14**). After Paul says that such unholy behavior will bar one from the kingdom of God, he writes: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (**1 Corinthians 6:11**).

After one's rebirth, Christians are called out of the world only to be sent back into the world to bring about transformation in the lives of men and women. One is to be loyal to the teachings of Jesus. If one withholds one's allegiance, one weakens the community of the redeemed; also, one detracts from his or her influence when one fails to commit one's life to the new order—God's new humanity in Jesus. When one is in Christ, Christians should remember that in Jesus the new life broke into the world. If the Church is to become a living force, it must break with the moulds of the powers of Satan. God's people must remember that it is through the Christian community that the Church has contact with the world. If Christians visit nightclubs with drinking bouts and lewd songs, how can one expect to reach out to the lost? One betrays his or her influence when one allows their salt to lose its savor. How can an individual witness to the truth that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ if one participates in darkness? Do you have a living faith? Partial devotion to God is not enough; it must be unlimited and unconditional devotion.

What is God's attitude toward those who approve such things, even if they do not take part? Again, one should listen carefully to the words of the Holy Spirit: "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (**1:27**). God condemns not only the act, but he also condemns the one who has pleasure in those who practice such wickedness. Transgressions and sins are not just sexual sins. When Christians mistreat one another, they sin. This includes ill treatment of one's wife or husband. When one abuses his or her spouse, one grieves the Holy Spirit. This kind of behavior is unacceptable to God. Keep your mind on Paul as he gives a list of actions that was true of the Gentiles before their conversion to Christ—life before rebirth:

> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit

those who listen. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (**Ephesians 4:29-32**).

Apparently some had not completely abandoned their former way of life. Thus, Paul warns them not to "pain" the Holy Spirit, whereby they were sealed unto the day of redemption. When Christians allow bitterness, rage, anger, slander, sexual sins, and so on to control their lives, they hurt God's Holy Spirit. Paul had to remind them to be kind and compassionate toward one another. Husbands and wives need to rethink these works of the flesh that saddens the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be "kind and compassionate to one another"? What does it mean to forgive "each other"? Are you guilty of rage and anger and brawling and slander in your home? Are you guilty of this kind of behavior outside the home? Does your life exemplify Christ? What about sexual relations between husband and wife in the home? Do you withhold sexual intimacy from your spouse? If so, you sin. Paul talks about the way to avoid fornication:

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.[a] [2] But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. [5] Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (**1 Corinthians 7:1-5**).

The husband should not treat his wife as a sex object. Some husbands are brutal in their demands of their wives in the area of sexual union. If there is abstinence, it should be with the consent of both. Deprivation of sex can expose one to the temptations of Satan from one's lack of self-control—burning with sexual desires. If the husband wishes respect from his wife, he must love her as Christ loves the Church. Paul, in the Ephesian Epistle, calls attention to the husband wife relationship:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. [25] Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26] to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, [27] and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. [28] In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29] After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares

> for it, just as Christ does the church— [30] for we are members of his body. [31] "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."[b] [32] This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. [33] However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (**Ephesians 5:22-32**).

Are these instructions from the Lord a part of your relationship with your spouse? This is "after" behavior on the part of every believer. Husbands, do you love your wives? Wives do you respect your husbands. Christians should not throw their weight around. All Christians are to submit to one another. Christians should esteem others more important than themselves: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (**Romans 12:10**). Paul elevated marriage by saying: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (**Ephesians 5:25**). Prior to life before rebirth, the ill treatment of wives was commonplace, but, after rebirth, Christians are to assume a different lifestyle. The fact that individuals have been raised from the dead should motivate all to want to walk with a clean heart. Christians are to put off the old man and put on the new man. Paul expresses it this way: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do" (**4:17**).

What is it that changed so many in the ancient world from this kind of lifestyle? It was the news of Jesus and His Resurrection that won so many in the ancient world to the new life in Christ. Paul, in his Epistle to Rome, writes about the new life:

> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. [14] For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:13-14**).

CONCLUSION

One's journey of transgressions and sins lead one to the Cross of Jesus where one finds forgiveness. This road to the Cross also begins one's new life in Christ. One's reflection upon the mighty act of God in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus generates new behavior. In Christ, one dies to his or her self-centeredness. Christians enter a new life in which Jesus is the center. Have you died to sin? Are you a light? Listen to Paul as he expresses his thoughts about the life after rebirth: "Do everything without complaining or arguing, [15] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe [16] as you hold out[a] the word of life" (**Philippians 2:14-16**).

As one thinks about the Cross of Jesus, one should view the Cross as the place where the long road of life before rebirth leads and ends, and, at the same time, the new road of life begins. God expects both men and women to respond to His initiative in redemption. One's life with God takes place at the Cross. God vindicated His actions in the crucifixion of Jesus by raising Him from the dead. The Resurrection is

proof that all is well. Yes, Calvary had a purpose in God's scheme of redemption. The question that confronts every believer is this: Am I living a life that gives credence to my belief in the Resurrection? Has the Resurrection made a change in your life? Does Satan dominate your life? If so, you have taken sides against God. If you continue to live according to your life before regeneration, you are living a life that is in rebellion against God. Is God the center of your life? Or is self the center of your life? Focus your attention once more on the life before rebirth:

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, [2] in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. [3] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (**Ephesians 3:1-3**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[2] I am grateful to Dr. Lloyd Jones for much of my insight concerning justification by faith. The late Dr. Jones, one of the ablest and most respected Bible expositors of the twentieth century, wrote several volumes on Romans. For an illustration of his ability to express clearly the teachings of Romans, see D. M. Lloyd Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 27 where he says:

> 'But now.' This is the essence of the Christian position; this is how faith answers the accusations of the Law, the accusations of conscience, and everything else that would condemn and depress us. These are indeed very wonderful words, and it is most important that we should lay hold of them and realize their tremendous importance and their real significance.

[3] Christian writer Leon Morris has penned some compelling words that need to be heard. See Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1983) 187, where he says:

> An important idea in the New Testament is that righteousness may be imputed. There are grounds for imputation in an Old Testament passage, that in which we read, 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' (Gn.15:6). This presents a problem to some modern people, because we so firmly believe that righteousness is an ethical quality. It is 'being good.' In that sense it is nonsense to talk about righteousness being imputed. Everyone who aspires to this kind of righteousness must merit it for himself, by right living. It cannot be 'credited' or 'reckoned' or 'imputed' to him other than in some fictitious and fanciful sense. But when we see righteousness as basically legal, as 'right-standing', it is another matter. A standing or status can be conferred. The narrative says that God conferred this status on Abraham because of his faith. Paul uses this as his

classic example of justification by faith. Abraham received his 'right-standing' not on account of any meritorious action but simply because he trusted God.

[4] Peter writes about the angels' intense desire to know something about this salvation:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**I Peter 1:10-12**).

[5] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 98.

a desires: Gr. wills

[6] *King James Version.*(Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

e blindness: or, hardness

a Or *our flesh*

a desires: Gr. wills

a Or "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*"

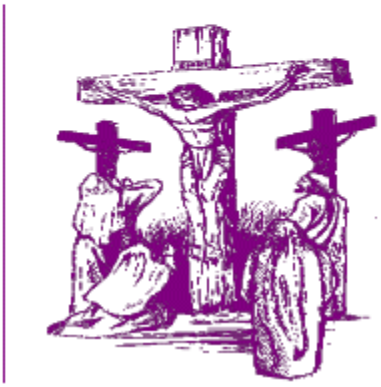
a Or *having cleansed*

b Gen. 2:24

a Or *hold on to*

a Or *our flesh*

Overview of the Book of Ephesians



Thrust Statement: **Paul explains the mystery of God previously hidden from prophets and angels.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 4:3-14**

INTRODUCTION

The **Book of Ephesians** extols the Gospel of Christ. This perception is generally not recognizable to many Christians because they do not pickup on the word *mystery*. Paul unfolds God's grace in this short Epistle. He discloses that the "mystery" kept hidden from ages past is all about the revelation of God's salvation made available to all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. For one to really and truly appreciate the miracle of God's blessings, one needs to count the number of times that one encounters the prepositions "in" and "through." The miracle of "rebirth" is even greater than raising the dead physically and making the physically blind to see. The overall theme in this book is hidden from many devout and sincere believers.

The question that confronts everyone is: Why have so many Christians failed to grasp the significance of this book? The answer lies, so it seems, in the practice of proof-texting in order to advance certain doctrinal beliefs based upon certain texts cited out of context. The source of many divisions today within the Churches of Christ is created when individuals invariably isolate Scripture from its context and then absolutize these Scriptures to teach what its author(s) did not intend. Some Christians read the Holy Writings through the narrow lens inherited from their forefathers. As a result of arbitrarily choosing one text to arrive at a certain dogmatic position, Christians, as a whole, have failed to read the book as a book.

One classic example of piece-meal reading is the philosophy that it is sinful to praise God with instruments of music in the so-called worship service. The idea that it is wrong to employ instruments of music in the public gathering of the church is

culturally conditioned upon traditions handed down from one generation to the next. This study seeks to avoid manipulation of biblical material in order to support prior ecclesiastical interest of a select few. What one discovers within certain circles within the Christian community is a "theology" of preachers and elders who wish to maintain their so-called distinctive roles as "defenders of the faith." As a result of this mentality, one discovers that language is distorted, evidence is ignored, and logic goes out the window. One of the most familiar Scriptures in the **Book of Ephesians** is **chapter 5** and **verse 19**. In addition to this famous citation, two other Scriptures from this book also take their place alongside **Ephesians 5:19**; these two Scriptures are **4:5** and **5:11**. The following is a chart of these three Scriptures:

Ephesians 5:19	**Ephesians 4:4-6**	**Ephesians 5:11**
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.	There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. .	Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

This author, Dallas Burdette, cut his eyeteeth, so to speak, on these three Scriptures. As a young preacher, I never read the **Book of Ephesians** as a book, but rather, I read this book in order to maintain that instrumental music was sinful.[1] I then cited **Ephesians 4:5**—"one faith"—to teach that anyone who advanced the Scripturalness of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine in the Lord's Supper, "breaking" the bread instead of "pinching' the bread, and so on were not a part of the "one faith." It just so happened that the "one faith" was the doctrinal interpretation of God's Word as advanced by the "one-cup and non-Sunday school movement."[2] Then, I cited **Ephesians 5:11** concerning the "unfruitful works of darkness" to give validity to my separation from Christians who disagreed with my interpretation of the Bible.[3] These three Scriptures are still cited by many sincere believers in order to uphold their particular brand of orthodoxy. One objective of this essay is to liberate the **Book of Ephesians** from the nineteenth-and-twentieth-centuries of ecclesiastic assumptions. Many of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ still hold to their own historic position as handed down by their own unique fellowship. Hopefully the following analysis will assist Christians in properly understanding the **Book of Ephesians** as a whole.

READING THE BOOK ACCURATELY

It goes almost without saying that "belief refers to a person's attitude toward a particular statement," but, on the other hand, "There is an important distinction between belief and truth. Truth is not relative, but belief is."[4] Again, Virkler correctly points out: "Beliefs do not change objective reality, although they do change a person's

subjective reality."[5] Instead of decontexualizing Ephesians from its past, this essay seeks to recontexualize the **Book of Ephesians** in terms of Paul's own agenda. One should heed the words of Anthony C. Thiselton, when he calls attention to the application that certain individuals make in their interpretation of the New Testament as being "no more than a manipulative mouthpiece for the interpreter's own conviction."[6]

As one approaches the **Book of Ephesians**, one stands in awe at the spiritual blessings that one experiences "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. This book takes one back, as it were, into eternity past—"before the creation of the world" (**Ephesians 1:9**).[7] Yes, Paul begins this book with the development of the "mystery" of God before the creation of the world (**1:3-14**) and ends this book with a request for the stamina of courage to make known the "mystery" of God, which is the Gospel of Christ (**6:19**). In the **first three chapters**, Paul expands this mystery, and in the **last three chapters**, he sets forth the implications of this mystery of God's will in the lives of God's people.

The central thrust of the Epistle appears to be the development of the "mystery" of God. Following Paul's presentation of this "mystery" in the **first three chapters**, Paul sets forth the implications of this mystery in the daily lives of God's people. The word *mystery* appears seven times in this short epistle (**1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19**). If one neglects to grasp the full import of this mystery in the **Book of Ephesians**, then one fails to appreciate the thrust of Paul's arguments throughout the epistle for unity among the people of God and holiness as one's way of life—twenty-four hours a day, not just one day a week on Sundays. If one does not care to state the overall subject of this Epistle in one's interpretation, one will not get the full picture of the **Book of Ephesians**. This book has one central theme—the unfolding of God's mystery, "which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:9**). Paul employs restatement about the "mystery" of God in order to draw attention to the essential focus of this Epistle.

If one wrenches citations from this book without cognition of its overall theme, one will ultimately utilize certain verses as launching pads for one's own opinions or to uphold one's own traditions. For example, some Christians cite **1:3-14** in order to give credence to their erroneous views concerning predestination (Calvinistic theology) —some predestined to go to Hell or Heaven without regard to faith in Jesus. Still, there are other Christians who cite **4:5** ("one faith") to advance the notion that Paul is setting forth their particular brand of orthodoxy. Yet, there is another group of believers who cite **5:19** as justification for rejection of instrumental music in corporate worship. If one neglects to read the **Book of Ephesians** as a whole, one can easily bend the Scriptures to conform to his/her own thoughts. In other words, what one hears is not the voice of God, but rather one's own voice. Haddon W. Robinson is therefore right when he says,

Having selected the passage, however, an expositor must allow it to speak for itself. Too often a passage will not say what we expected it to say. Topical exposition faces the special danger that the preacher will read something into the scriptural account in order to read something significant out of it. He may resort to "proof texts" for favorite doctrines by ignoring completely the context in which a passage lies. He may be

tempted to transform a biblical author into a modern psychologist by insisting that he say in a sermon what he never said in the Bible. Topical exposition differs form the so-called topical sermon, therefore, in that the thought of the Scripture must shape all that is said in defining and developing the topic.[8]

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Mystery Briefly Explained

Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul breaks out into ecstatic praise as he reflects upon the spiritual blessings in Christ: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**). The spiritual blessings are not outside of Christ, but rather "in Christ." Again, one observes Paul's words as he reflects upon the ones chosen before the creation of the world: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**1:4**). The ones chosen are those who are "in him." Paul develops this concept by saying: "In love [5] he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (**1:5**). Once more Paul stresses the place where all of this activity takes place: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (**1:7-8**).

In **verses 3-8**, Paul spells out the real meaning of the "mystery" in the **Book of Ephesians**. The choosing, the adoption, and the redemption are events that transpire "in" and "through" Him, the savior of humanity. The mystery of God is about His rich grace lavished on sinful beings "in the One he loves" (**1:6**). Paul established the details of this revelation of God's mystery as having reference to Christ:

> And he [b] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**1:9-10**).

The above verses (**1:3-10**) detail the nature of the Gospel, which is described in this book as the "mystery of his will" (**1:9**). Now, Paul brings together two terms—chosen and predestined—mentioned earlier (**1:4-5**) in order to demonstrate where all of this takes place: "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (**1:11**). The choosing and the predestination takes place in Jesus Christ, which is the mystery kept hidden in God from ages past. The question that confronts everyone is: How does one become a part of the chosen and predestined? Paul explains in very clear and unmistakable terms:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our

inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**).

When were the Ephesians included "in Christ"? Paul says, "when you heard the word of truth." What is the "word of truth"? Paul defines this "word of truth" as "the gospel of your salvation." This "word of truth," or "the gospel of your salvation" is equivalent to the "mystery of his will" in **1:9**. But Paul does not stop with the phrase, "when you heard the word of truth," but he continues by saying, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." In order for one to become a part of the chosen or predestined, one must "hear the word of truth" and believe the message of salvation, namely, the mystery of God, which is Christ. In the Colossian letter, Paul writes about this mystery also:

> I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (**Colossians 2:1-3**).

In **Colossians 2:2**, Paul clearly identifies this mystery as "Christ." Earlier, in this same epistle, Paul sets forth this mystery in glowing terms:

> I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (**1:25-27**).

Paul, in both Ephesians and Colossians, seeks to develop an appreciation of this "mystery of God" in order to bring about praise to the One who, from eternity past, decreed how men and women could stand justified in His sight. This mystery involved the reconciling of the whole of humanity unto Himself "in" and "through," Jesus. He wanted all believers "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (**Ephesians 3:18**) in leaving glory to become man in order to redeem sinful humanity (see also **Philippians 2:1-11**).

Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesians and Colossians a clear understanding of the magnitude of what God had actually brought about through Christ (**Ephesians 1:17** and **Colossians 2:1-2**). If one can grasp the significance of this mystery, then one's lifestyle will exhibit holiness on a daily basis. Prior to the unfolding of this mystery through His apostles, the prophets, too, had searched diligently concerning the time frame of this unfolding of the mystery that had been kept hidden in God from ages past (**1 Peter 1:10-13**; **Colossians 2:1-2**). Following Paul's one sentence (**Ephesians 1:3-14**—Greek text), he breaks out once more into ecstasy as he seeks to call attention to the greatness of what God accomplished for mankind in and through Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the wonder of it all:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. [18] I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, [20] which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (**1:17-23**).

Paul wanted God to enlighten their hearts in order that they might come to appreciate something of the richness of what God accomplished in Christ. He wanted them to comprehend this "mystery of his will." In chapter two, he works out in detail the consequences of their belief in Jesus as God's Anointed One for the redemption of the human race. Before leaving this pericope—Spiritual Blessings in Christ—it is significant that Paul sets forth the ethical implications resulting from one's being in Christ: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**1:4**). In **chapters 4—6**, he works out the moral aspects of one's life that results from a change in venue, namely, Christ. The next occurrence of the word *mystery* occurs in **3:3**.

Mystery Developed in Detail

Ephesians 3:3, 4, 6, 9

The next four occurrences of this word *mystery* are found in the **third chapter**. An analysis of the word *mystery* in each of the four verses reveals the nature of this mystery. This mystery is about "the administration of God's grace" (**3:2**). Paul, as it were, employs various phrases to capture the word *mystery*—"the word of truth," "the gospel of your salvation," and "the administration of God's grace." Prior to this last phrase—"the administration of God's grace"—Paul explains the benefits that result from one's union with Christ, which is what the mystery is all about (**2:11-22**). Thus, Paul begins the **third chapter** with the words: "For this reason" (**3:1**). Then in **verses 3—9**, he develops the very heart of this "mystery" that he wanted God to allow the Ephesians to recognize the full import of what He had achieved in and through Jesus Christ. The following verses expound the substance of this mystery:

[2] Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, [3] that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. [4] In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5] which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [6] This mystery is that through the

gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. [7] I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10] His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. [13] I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory (**3:2-23**).

In **verse two**, Paul calls this mystery the "administration of God's grace," but in **verse nine**, he calls it "the administration of this mystery." Then in **verse three**, he identifies this "administration of God's grace" as "the mystery made known to me by revelation." Also in **verse three**, he says, "As I have already written briefly." Where had Paul "written briefly" about this mystery? Just a casual glance at **1:3-14** and **1:17-23** reveals the "administration of God's grace" as equivalent to "the administration of this mystery." In **3:3**, he repeats what he desired in **1:18**, namely, the comprehension of insight into the vastness of this marvelous feat of redemption for both Jew and Gentile in and through Jesus Christ (**2:14; 3:6**).

Paul goes right to the heart of this mystery when he writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (**3:6**). The phrase "one body" is significant. In **chapter two**, Paul speaks of "one new man" (**2:15**), "one body" (**2:16**), and "one spirit" (**2:18**). In **chapter four**, Paul calls for unity because there is just "one body" and "one Spirit" (**4:1-6**). The prophets had prophesied this mystery, but the prophets did not understand when the coming of Christ would take place. Peter describes this mystery as "this salvation" as well as "the grace that was to come." Peter, too, develops the unfolding of this mystery that had been kept hidden, even from the prophets:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

The prophets tried to find out when all this would take place. This mystery was hidden even from the angels. They, too, desired to stoop low and look into this marvelous grace, which was hidden in God. In **Ephesians 3**, Paul informs the Ephesians that "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of

God should be make known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose when he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Ephesians 3:10-11**). In other words, the church is a university, so to speak, for the angelic host. It is through the church that the angels learn about this salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. If one preaches the mystery of God's will, then one preaches the Gospel, namely, Jesus.

In **3:6-13**, Paul elaborates on the mystery as the unfolding of God's grace to the Gentiles. God extended grace to Paul in order that he might "preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:8-9**). When one discusses the "unsearchable riches of Christ," one is discussing the "administration of this mystery." When one preaches the gospel, he/she is divulging the means whereby God reconciles the world unto Himself. Paul forcefully concludes with his summation of this mystery that he wrote about briefly in the **first chapter**: "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (**3:12**). Jesus is the object of one's faith. Since Jesus is the object of this "one faith," then Paul speaks of "one Lord" and "one faith" (**4:5**).

The Outcome of This Mystery

Ephesians 2:11-22

The **first three chapters** of Ephesians describe in detail the "mystery of His will" (**1:9**). The objective of this essay thus far has been to zero in on the word *mystery*. Just a perusal of this epistle reveals that Paul seeks to develop their understanding of what this "mystery" is all about—namely, the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile to God "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. In **chapter one**, Paul employs the word *mystery* one time, but, in **chapter three**, he employs the word *mystery* four times. Beginning with **1:3** through **2:22**, Paul endeavors to explain what this "mystery" is all about. A detailed explanation of this mystery is found in **2:11-22**. In this pericope—One in Christ—he explains that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled unto God in "one body" (**2:16**).

In this section (**2:11-22**), he calls attention to the Gentiles by saying: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (**2:13**). Again, one observes that Paul stresses "in Christ Jesus." Paul then deals with the question of Jew and Gentile in their relationship to each other. He says that Jesus is "our peace," and it is Jesus who has created in Himself "one new man out of the two" (**2:15-16**). Thus, Jesus has reconciled both—Jew and Gentile—unto God in "one body." Paul, in this pericope, brings in the Holy Spirit by saying: "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (**2:16**). One can hardly read this unit of Scripture (**2:11-22**) without a consciousness of the expressions of "one body" and "one Spirit." Again, in **chapter three**, Paul explains this mystery as the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile into "one body" (**3:6**).

Unity in the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:1-4

Is it any wonder that Paul speaks of the seven ones in **Ephesians 4:1-4**. In this pericope—Unity in the Body of Christ—Paul says that there is "one body" and "one Spirit." Since this is so, then one should endeavor to maintain the unity created by the "one Sprit" (**4:3**). Paul writes:

> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**4:3-6**).

The phrase "one faith" is frequently associated with one particular brand of orthodoxy. For example, over twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ cite this Scripture in order to uphold its particular beliefs concerning "pattern theology." In other words, the "one faith" represents the belief system that God has ordained a worship service with five ritualistic acts that have to be performed in a prescribed manner. For many Christians, the "one faith" is not faith in Jesus, but rather their weird interpretation of certain Scriptures.

Just a cursory glance of this Epistle by Paul reveals that Jesus is the object of this "one faith," not some odd interpretation placed upon some Scripture. This whole epistle is about "faith" in the "one Lord." For example, Paul having developed this mystery—Christ—(**1:3-14**), he writes: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (**1:15-16**). Again, Paul calls attention to faith in **chapter three**: "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (**3:12**). Earlier, Paul writes:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**).

The "word of truth," "gospel of your salvation," "mystery of God's will," and "Christ" are synonymous terms. What had they believed? They believed that Christ is the one and only way to God. This is why that Paul immediately broke out in praise with the words: "ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus" (**1:15**). Then Paul explains that it is in Christ that one is made alive (**2:1-10**). In this pericope, he writes:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**2:8-10**).

Jesus is the object of one's faith. One is saved "through faith" in Him (**3:12**). No wonder Paul concludes his explanation of the "mystery" with the words, "one Lord, one faith" (**4:5**). Once more, in **chapter three**, Paul writes: "so that Christ may

dwell in your hearts through faith" (**3:17**). Following Paul's use of the expression "one faith" in **4:5**, he discusses how God

> gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (**4:11-13**).

"Unity in the faith" concerns a proper understanding of "the knowledge of the Son of God" in God's scheme of redemption. Jesus is the object of the "one faith." Paul wanted God to open their eyes to understand the full meaning of what He accomplished "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul once more as he explains his prayer concerning "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God":

> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (**3:16-19**).

Living As Children of Light

Ephesians 4:17—21

Paul begins the **fourth chapter** of Ephesians with a call to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (**4:1**). The acceptance of Christ into one's life demands a change in one's external behavior. Beginning with **4:17**, Paul encourages those who have placed their faith in Jesus as Lord to live upright and godly lives. As one approaches **chapter five** and **verse 19**, one quickly discovers from the context that Paul is concerned about behavior that will honor God. Unfortunately, too many Christians have lifted **5:19** out of context in order to uphold their objection to instrumental music during the so-called worship service. One cannot limit **5:19** just to a church service. If so, then one would have to limit **verse 18** to a church service also. Is Paul saying that one should "not get drunk on wine" while you are in a church service? Or is he saying that one ought never to get drunk with wine—in or out of the assembly.

Just a casual glance of **chapter five** reveals that Paul is concerned about external behavior in one's daily walk with God. For instance, Paul goes right to the heart of ethical conduct when he writes: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10] and find out what pleases the Lord" (**5:8**). Again, he writes in this same chapter: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (**5:15-16**).

The Ephesians were "to live a life of love" (**5:2**). He wanted them to "understand what the Lord's will is" (**5:17**).

The will of God is that His people refuse to walk in the ways of the world. For this reason, he exhorts the believers: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery" (**5:18a**). This exhortation is not limiting this kind of behavior only to a so-called church service. Rather, he wants them to "be filled with the Spirit" (**5:18b**). Instead of singing lewd songs and making lewd music as the heathen do, one should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in one's heart to the Lord. God desires His people to sing and make music with all their heart to the Lord (**5:19**). **Ephesians 5:19** is in a context of external behavior twenty-four hours a day—whether assembled or not. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to "Have nothing do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (**5:11**). The following chart sets forth the deeds of darkness that Paul warns against:

LIVING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT	
Ephesians 4:25-32	**Ephesians 5:1-8**
Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin"[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.	Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.[b] 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

Once more, a word of note concerning **Ephesians 5:11** is in order. This passage is frequently cited in order to justify separation from other sincere Christians over trivial doctrinal issues, especailly in the Stone-Campbell Movement. This Scripture is another example of twisting Scripture in order to maintain the traditions of the church. This Scripture is alluded to because of its reference to "fruitless deeds of darkness." The interpretation placed upon this phrase is frequently latched onto in order to justify one's separation from other Christians who participate in the use of individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, teaching children and adults in Sunday school classes, acceptance of **Matthew 5:32** as applicable in the Messianic Age, and so on. This phrase—"fruitless deeds of darkness"—has to do with the works of the flesh, not the frivolous things that Christians fight over. Remember the following before you seek to interpret any Scripture: CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT.

CONCLUSION

This essay began with an analysis of Paul's expression—"mystery"—to describe the spiritual blessings available in Christ Jesus. This paper also sought to briefly examine election, adoption, and predestination in light of Paul's explanation of the "mystery of God's will." In addition to this emphasis upon the word *mystery*, this article also called attention to the misapplication of certain Scriptures—**1:3-14; 4:5; 5:19**; and **5:11**. This discussion of this short Epistle has zeroed in on the context for its analysis. Without context, one can build his or her belief system within the intent of the author(s). It is also significant that Paul began this Epistle with an explanation of the "mystery" of God and concludes this Epistle with a request for prayer in order that he might be faithful, in spite of persecution, to proclaim the gospel of God without fear of man's power of destruction. He brings to a close this Epistle with the following words:

> Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (**6:19-20**).

This mystery is about God's methodology of redemption, namely, Jesus Christ. It is "in" and "through" Jesus that one obtains salvation. Throughout this Epistle, one discovers the following expressions that set forth election, adoption, and predestination as occurring in a particular person: "in Him," "in the One," "in the Lord Jesus," "through Jesus Christ," "in Christ Jesus," "in Christ," "in the Lord," and "through Him." God accomplished, according to Paul, salvation for all who put their trust in Jesus (**1:13**). He writes that one can approach God with freedom and confidence "in him and through faith in him (**3:11**).

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[1] For a detailed study of the subject of instrumental music, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music" [ON-LINE]. Available from http: www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL

STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[2] For a detailed study of the subject of the "one Faith" "see Dallas Burdette, "One Faith" [ON-LINE]. Available from http:www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[3] For a detailed study of the subject of unfruitful works of darkness, see Dallas Burdette, "Unfruitful Works of Darkness" [ON-LINE]. Available from http:www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[4] Henry A. Virkler, *A Christian's Guide to Critical Thinking* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 90. See also Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) for an excellent treatment of how to read in context.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32.

[7] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

[8] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Baker, 2000), 57.

Praise for Salvation to the Father

Thrust Statement: **Salvation elicits praise from the saved.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:3**

Even though this message about spiritual blessings in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3-14**) is one continuous sentence[1], nevertheless, the following comments will be developed by analyzing this unit under several headings in order to help one mold his or her understanding of the greatness of God's salvation made available to everyone in and through Jesus Christ. As one seeks to unroll the Book of Ephesians, one quickly observes that all spiritual blessings have been won for the children of wrath, or sons of disobedience, on the Cross. These spiritual blessings are available only for those who respond to "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (**1:13**). The Book of Ephesians unfolds God's plan of salvation that was hidden from eternity past. In other words, even before the creation of the universe, God had already decreed a means of rescue, but this "mystery" was not known in its fullness until Christ came, not even the angels understood (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

Mystery of His Will (1:9)

In this section (**1:3-14**), one reads of election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness of sins, wisdom, understanding, unity in a broken world, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. One should shout for joy as he or she reflects upon the blessings that are listed in this short Epistle. The ones listed by Paul should encourage one to praise God for such marvelous blessings. Basically, all of these ideas come under one umbrella—"mystery of His will." This pericope (unite or section—**1:3-14**) of Scripture represents the Gospel of God in a nutshell, so to speak. In the remainder of this book, Paul seeks to unravel in detail what he set forth in an epitomized form in one sentence concerning the essence of the Good News of God. Paul expresses himself this way: "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, [3] that is, the mystery (μυστηψριον musthvrion, "secret") made known to me

by revelation, as I have already written briefly" (**3:2-3**).[2] The following charts illustrate how Paul seeks to unfold the "the mystery of his will" (**1:9**):

CHART ONE	
Ephesians 1:13	**Ephesians 1: 18**
And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.	I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

CHART TWO	
Ephesians 3:2	**Ephesians 3:4**
Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,	In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ

CHART THREE	
Ephesians 3:8	**Ephesians 3:9**
Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.	And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

The "mystery of his will" in **1:9** is equivalent to the "word of truth" in **1:13a**. The "word of truth" is synonymous with the "gospel of your salvation in **1:13b**. The "gospel of your salvation" equals the "riches of his glorious inheritance" in **1:18**. The "riches of his glorious inheritance" is identical with the "administration of God's grace" in **3:2**. The "administration of God's grace" is indistinguishable from the "mystery of Christ" in **3:4**. Again, the "mystery of Christ" is the same as the "administration of this mystery" in **3:9**. Paul varied his expressions concerning this "mystery" in order to assist individuals in grasping this "mystery of his will." Just a casual glance of this paragraph reveals that numerous synonyms were employed in order to capture more fully the words of Paul—for example, observe the following synonymous expressions that add weight, or clarity, to my analysis of Paul's employment of the term *mystery:* equivalent, synonymous, equals, identical, indistinguishable, and same.

Explosion of Worship (1:13-14)

As one reads **1:3-14**, one observes an outburst of adoration. This whole paragraph is frequently referred to as a eulogy. In fact, Paul begins this section with the English word *blessed*. This English translation *blessed* comes from the Greek word ευξλογητοψ (euloghtos, "worthy of praise") and is only employed of God in the New Testament. [3]Paul, as he reflects upon God's spiritual blessings in Christ can only eulogize God for His blessings: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**).[4]

There appears, according to John R. W. Stott and Charles Hodge, to be a reference to the Trinity in this verse. The Holy Spirit is derived from the word *spiritual*. The origin of every spiritual blessing is from God the Father, the sphere of every spiritual blessing is in the Son, and the nature of every "spiritual blessing" is the Holy Spirit—a phrase that may mean, "the sphere of the blessings which are related to the Spirit."[5] Having said this, one cannot be too dogmatic in this interpretation that relates the blessings to the Holy Spirit. It may simply mean that the blessings are spiritual in nature, not carnal. Charles Hodge (1797-1878) writes in defense of the Holy Spirit interpretation. Hodge, American Presbyterian theologian, commented this way concerning the meaning of this phrase as having reference to the Holy Spirit: "These blessings are ***spiritual*** not merely because they pertain to the soul, but because derived from the Holy Spirit, whose presence and influence are the great blessing purchased by Christ."[6]

Spiritual Versus Carnal Blessings (1:3)

One cannot disagree that spiritual gifts are from the Holy Spirit. Yet, in light of the context, it does not appear that the adjective "spiritual" (πνευματικῇ pneumatikh refers to the Holy Spirit. It seems that Paul is simply saying that these blessings are spiritual in nature, not carnal in nature. The context must decide the nature and content of

these blessings. These blessings are enumerated in Paul's eulogy (praise) of astonishment—electing, redeeming, and sealing. One reads of the Father's electing before the creation of the world (**1:4-6**), the Son's redemption through His blood (**1:7-12**), and the Holy Spirit's sealing as a guarantee of one's inheritance (**1:13-14**). Even if **1:3** does not refer to the Holy Spirit, one still finds ample evidence concerning the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the salvation of every individual. For example, Paul writes about the activities of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit in redemption. The following charts should also cause praise to the love of all:

CHART FOUR	
Ephesians 2:18	**Ephesians 3:14-17**
For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.	For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory,

	to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; [17] That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.

CHART FIVE	
Ephesians 4:4-6	**Ephesians 5:18-20**
There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [5] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.	And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; [19] Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; [20] Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

God the Father gives every spiritual blessing "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. God the Father lavishes His bounties upon all who put their trust in His Son Jesus. Jesus is the means of receiving and enjoying these spiritual blessings. Paul's explanation of election, redemption, and sealing breaks forth in praise (ε[παινö epainos) at the end of each section:

> To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves (1:6).
> In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory (**1:12**).
> Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:14**).

However one interprets **verse 3**—with or without a consciousness of the trinity—one is still conscious that the Trinity works together in the salvation of the "sons of disobedience" [υιΣοι' τή' αςπειθειψά Juiois ths apeiqeias] (**2:2**), or the "children of wrath by nature" (τεψκνα φυψσει οςργή' tekna fusei orghs). God's initiative jumps out as one peruses this one continuous sentence in the Greek text (**1:3-14**). For example, in **verse 3**, he says, "Who has blessed us." Again, in **verse 4**, Paul writes, "He chose us in Him. Once more, in **verse 6**, he pens, "He has freely given us." Yet again, Paul just cannot stop praising God as the source of salvation: "He lavished on us" (**verse 8**). This word *lavished* paints a mental picture of God's richness in blessing humanity in and through His Son Jesus. Another time, he writes, "He made known to us the mystery of His will" (**verse 9**). Paul employs several verbs in this section in order to describe God's activity in salvation.

In Christ (1:3)

Not only does one witness the source of salvation, but also one is immediately conscious of the sphere of this salvation—"in Christ." One cannot read **verses 3-14** without a consciousness of Christ's role in one's redemption. The blessings from God are bestowed upon those who are "in Christ." The name of Jesus and His title appear frequently in this Greek sentence (**1:3-14**). The phrase "in Christ" (εςν Χριστώ' en Cristw) occurs four times (**1:3, 9, 12, 13**). Paul also utilizes the phrase "in Him" or "in whom" (εςν αυςτώ' en autw or εςν ω/́ en Jw) to inform his readers as to the place of all spiritual blessings. The NIV translates both Greek phrases as "in Him") four times (**1:4, 7, 11, 13**). "Through Jesus Christ" (διαψ Ιςησου' Χριστου' dia Ihsou Cristou) appears only once in this sentence. Just a casual reading of this Greek sentence reveals that Jesus is the sphere in which salvation occurs. For a more detailed study of these phrases, see Chapter One (Two Spheres: Human and Divine).

Election in Christ (1:3)

In **verses 4-14**, Paul's language overflows with spiritual blessings that God has extended to everyone who hears the Gospel and believes (**1:13**). First, Paul writes: "According as he hath chosen us (εςξελεψξατο ηΣμά' exelexato Jamas) in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (**1:4**). God choose us "in him" before the creation of the world. God is the One who determined how He could save us. This redeeming work would be accomplished through Christ. This election is from eternity. It is God's unmerited favor. According to Paul, Christ is the eternal foundation of this election—"in Christ." If one wishes to become a part of the elect of God, one must exercise his or her faith in Christ after hearing the Word of truth, that is to say, God's Way of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ (**1:13**; **2:8**). Yes, God has made election and adoption possible through belief in His Son. Paul expresses election this way:

> In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, [14] Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**, KJV).

The election centers on Christ. If one wishes to become a part of the elect of God, one must accept Christ. As stated above, it is "in Christ," that is to say, "in Him" that one becomes a part of God's elect. God has blessed us in time and chose us in eternity past "in Christ." Again, Paul expresses how the first Jewish converts became a part of God's elect: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: [12] That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (**1:11-12**). Also, the Gentiles, too, became a part of God's elect "after" they believed the Gospel of salvation (**1:13-14**). Election results in holiness (**1:4**). One must ever be mindful that the Christian life is lived in God's sight, in God's presence, and is open to His scrutiny. Are you concerned for godliness? Are you growing in purity? Listen to the words of Paul once more as he explains the implications of God's election: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (**1:4**).

Adoption in Christ (1:5)

The second spiritual blessing that Paul praises God for is adoption (**1:5**). In this verse, Paul also speaks of predestination. Listen to Paul as he breaks forth in high spirits about adoption:

> Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (1:5-6).

The distinguishing blessings of the New Covenant are spiritual, not carnal. In the scheme of redemption, God has chosen to accomplish His objectives through a new community (**2:11-22**; see also **Matthew 16:18**). It is in this new community (church) that God brings about His purpose of redemption. When one is "in Christ," one becomes a part of the New Community with its New Covenant. Again, Paul drives home this point in **Chapter Three**: "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (**Ephesians 3:11-12**, KJV). Whenever one speaks of election or adoption, one speaks of God's grace, God's love, and God's will whereby He has made us accepted in Jesus. God's election and adoption should lead to righteous behavior toward God and toward humanity. The purpose of election is for adoption into Christ, the family of God.

Have you experienced the "spirit of adoption"? Do you sense that God is your Father? Do you address God as your Father? Do you pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (**Matthew 6:9**)? God's predestination and election and adoption lay the foundation for adoring gratitude for all His spiritual blessings made available in and through Christ. His election and adoption and pardon demands ethical behavior on the part of every believer. Holiness is the end for which God's elect are chosen and delivered. God's choice of a new community is only in Christ. A consciousness of God's election leads one from antinomianism (lawlessness) to righteousness. All men and women have sinned, but God, in His infinite mercy, devised a way to redeem humanity—faith in and through Jesus.

Predestination in Christ (1:5)

It is through Jesus that God has conferred His mercies upon sinful humanity. No one can be chosen to eternal life outside of Jesus. The election and adoption have reference to Him. God has predestined His people to maturity. God has not predestined certain people to go to Hell and others to go to Heaven. Predestination is reserved, not for the lost, for those who are in God's family. If you wish to become a part of the predestined, you have to become a part of Christ's body. As one reflects upon adoption, one is confronted with something that staggers the imagination. Christians praise God because of His desire to bring individuals into a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus by adoption.

The words *adopted as sons* are from the Greek word υιΣοθεσιψα Juioqesia, which term was used in the Greco-Roman World to refer to those who were not sons by birth. Paul utilizes this word in order to describe the new relationship believers have with God. Paul describes God's choice of election and predestination as the means of bringing individuals into His family and creating intimate fellowship with them. Since God adopts those who put their trust in Jesus, He makes them children and heirs. Even

though this relationship has not yet reached its fullness (see **Romans 8:23**), God has given His Holy Spirit as a guarantee of the future inheritance.

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).

As stated above, the sons of disobedience and children of wrath (**2:2-3**) are able to know God and have a relationship with Him through the agency of Jesus Christ (διαψ Ιςησου' Χριστου' dia Ihsou Cristou). Paul states this truth to the churches in the province of Galatia: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:26**). Once more, in this same epistle, Paul calls attention to sonship: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**4:4-5**). As a child of God, are you taking advantage of spiritual blessings in Christ? Have you ever stopped to think of what you have in Christ? One can hardly wonder about what he or she has in Christ without reflecting upon gifts that stagger the imagination.

Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, writes: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). In other words, Jesus became wisdom to us from God. How? God made Him to be our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. God's wisdom devised a means whereby He could adopt children of wrath as His children. Do we praise God for making Jesus "our righteousness, holiness and redemption"? Has this consciousness of God's grace made a difference in our response to God's mercy and kindness? Are we willing to take action in a positive way to God's spiritual blessings made available in Christ Jesus?

I wish to share two narratives to illustrate two responses to an inheritance (financial fortunes)—one negative and the other positive. In your reading these stories, I am wondering how you will reply to God's spiritual blessings? In your reading these two moving stories by Vernon McGee (1904-1988), I encourage you to apply the positive, not the negative, to your spiritual walk with God. McGhee tells two stories that are true in order to illustrate how some do not react properly to God's spiritual blessings in Christ. He writes:

> When I was in Chicago many years ago, I picked up the evening paper during the week and read a little article and clipped it out. It was way down at the bottom of the front page and wasn't apt to be noticed. It read "The flophouses and saloons of Chicago's Skid Row were searched today for one Stanley William McKenna Walker, 50, an Oxford graduate and heir to half of an $8,000,000 English estate. The missing persons detail hoped that somewhere among the down-and-outers who line the curbs and sleep off wine binges in the cheap hotels they would find Walker, son of a wealthy British shipbuilder." I thought how tragic it was. Imagine being an heir to half of $8,000,000 and being a wino who's sleeping in two-bit hotels. I felt like sitting down and weeping for that poor fellow. Then I began thinking of

> the children of God today who are living in cheap hotels, living off the little "wine" of this world. I don't mean that literally, but that they engage in cheap entertainment down here. They are wealthy beyond the dreams of Croesus and are blessed with all spiritual blessings, but they live like paupers down here. There are a lot of folk in our churches who live like that today, and it's tragic. I was telling this story when I was a pastor in Los Angeles, and a lady who was visiting from Chicago came up afterward and asked, "Dr. McGee, do you know the end of that story?" I said, "No, I never heard." She said, "Well, they found him." "Oh," I replied, "that was wonderful." "No," she said, "they found him dead in a doorway on a cold night later on that fall." How tragic to die like that man died. Many Christians live and die like that, and yet they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.[7]

The second narrative by McGhee tells the story of another man who inherited a fortune, but his reaction was totally different from the son of a British shipbuilder. He says,

> The second true story happened out West here, years ago. An heir to a British nobleman was living in poverty and barely eking out an existence. After the nobleman died, they began to look for his heir and when they found him, they told him about his inheritance. A great deal of publicity was made of it. Do you know what that fellow did? He immediately went down to the clothing store and ordered their best suit and then bought a first class ticket to return to England in style. Do you know why? He believed the inheritance was his, and he acted upon it. My friend, you can go either route. You can travel your Christian life in first class or in steerage. You can go second, third, or fourth class, and there are a lot of Christians doing that today. God wants you to know that you've been blessed with *all* spiritual blessings. He hasn't promised us physical blessings, but He has promised spiritual ones, and these are in the heavenlies in Christ. My friend, you're not going to have any spiritual blessing in this life that doesn't come to you through Jesus Christ. That's just how important He is. He not only has saved us, but He is also the One who blesses us. How we need to lay hold of Him today and to start living as a child of God should live![8]

CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, there are no spiritual blessings outside of Christ. Are you like the first heir or the second heir? In McGhee's stories, how have you responded to God's grace? Have you responded in a positive way to the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ (**1:3**)? Are you aware that He chose men and women to be holy and blameless in Christ (**1:4**)? Are you cognizant that He predestined all who hear and believe in His Son to sonship (**1:5**)? Are you conscious that He made every believer acceptable in the One He loved (**1:6**)? Are you sensitive to the truth that "in Christ" "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"? As you contemplate the spiritual blessings listed by Paul in **1:3-14**, do you cry out: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (**1:3**)?

[1] In the Greek New Testament, these twelve verses constitute a single complex sentence.

[2] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[3] See Mark 14:61; Luke 1:68; Romans 1:25; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3. This word appears in the Septuagint numerous times, always translating some form of Er~B* B*r^K. The adjective is almost always applied to God. See, for example, Genesis 9:26; 14:20; Exodus 18:10; Ruth 2:20; 4:14; 2 Samuel 18:28.

[4] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[5] Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, "Ephesians," *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 434. See also John W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* in *The Bible Speaks Today*, *The New Testament Series* (Downer Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 32-33.

[6] Hodge, Charles, *Commentary on Ephesians* [CD-ROM] (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996).

[7] McGee, J. Vernon. *I Corinthians—Revelation* in *Thru the Bible Commentary,* Vol. 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981), 212.

Ibid.

Thrust statement: **Predestination and election is cause for praise.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:3-6.**

> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.[1]

As one contemplates the richness of what God accomplished on Calvary for us through Jesus Christ, one can only break out in praise. This is exactly what Paul did in his reflection upon redemption. He breaks out into the exclamation that God is worthy of applause for such a scheme of liberation from condemnation. Paul paints a picture of God's eternal purpose and character and glory through the words *predestination* and *election*. He felt that it laid the foundation for eternal adoration. He sensed that it presented a glorious view of God. He considered *predestination* and *election* the ground and confidence of hope for the believer. Thus, Paul felt that this understanding of His purpose for mankind should elicit praise from the saints in Christ Jesus. For Paul this knowledge should give every Christian an elevated conception of the glory of God's divine character.

If you leave out the "in Christ" you will never experience the blessings enjoyed by Christians. Paul is dealing with "particular grace" when he writes about *predestination* and *election*. There is such a thing as "common grace" that

is applicable to humanity as a whole. For example, Jesus speaks of this common grace in His Sermon on the Mount: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (**Matthew 5:45**). None but Christians participates in the benefits of particular grace; on the other hand, both sinners and Christians share in common much good that comes to the world at large.

What are the spiritual blessings? A careful analysis of this section (**1:3-14**) enumerates many blessings. For example, consider the following: (1) predestination and election [**1:4, 5, 11],** (2) acceptance with God through Jesus Christ [**1:6**], (3) forgiveness of sins and redemption through Jesus Christ [**1:7**], (4) revelation of the divine mystery [**1:9**], and (5) union in and with Christ [**1:10**]. All of these blessings come in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the beginning as well as the end. He is the Alpha and the Omega. There are no blessings apart from Him. It is as Peter proclaimed to the Sanhedrin: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). Again, in this same mind-set, Paul declares, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (**1 Timothy 2:5**).

There can be no toleration for anyone else as savior of the world; it is Jesus and Him alone. Paul, in his letter to Colossae, writes: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (**Colossians 1:19-20**). The same concept is presented to the Christians at Ephesus: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). Believers must never forget that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (**Colossians 2:9**).

Chosen in Him

Paul reminds the Ephesians about their election: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesians 1:4**). Paul, in this chapter, begins to explain how all the spiritual blessings in Christ become ours. To begin with, Paul goes right back into eternity—before the creation of the world—and starts with what God accomplished for us through Jesus Christ. This is a staggering thought. In this epistle, Christians are brought face to face with one of the greatest mysteries of all time. It is the business of every believer to deal with the subject of *predestination* and *election* afresh, not the traditional views espoused by Calvin and many other devout Christians.

One of the advantages that Christians experience in going through a book of the Bible-verse by verse—is that it compels individuals to tackle every single statement in context. This allows everyone to stand before the text, to look at the text, and to allow the text to speak on its own. An analysis of this text (**1:3-14**) is

not to be approached in an aggressive spirit (I'm right and you are wrong) or in a splinter group mentality (it's my way or no way). These Scriptures should never be approached with heat, anger, or dogmatism, but rather with reverence and awe. *Predestination* and *election* is a subject that should be approached with admiration and with a sense of awe. It would be helpful for every Christian to remember that he/she is on holy ground when they draw near the sacred Word. If God's people do not move toward this subject in the proper spirit, then it is certain that brothers and sisters in Christ will never begin to fathom something of the greatness of what God accomplished for humanity "in and through" Jesus Christ.

As one approaches **Ephesians 1:4**, one perceives that Paul is making a statement, not an argument. He simply sets forth the doctrine of *predestination* and *election* as having occurred before the creation of the world. But in the making of these statements, he states emphatically that this *predestination* and *election* had to do with adoption and holiness. One can refuse to become a part of the elect and thus reject holiness as a way of life that God had before the creation of the world predestined that those who become a part of the elect should choose. Paul frequently touches upon this subject in his epistles. Take, for instance, his second letter to the Thessalonians in which he writes:

> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (**2 Thessalonians 2:13-14**).

God chose the Thessalonians to be saved through (1) "the sanctifying work of the Spirit," and (2) "belief in the truth." God did not choose them separate and apart from these two truths. In other words, He did not choose certain individuals to be saved or lost before the creation of the world without respect to the "sanctifying work of the Spirit" and "belief of the truth." This is a marvelous truth. He chose you to salvation by means of the sanctifying work of the Spirit and your acceptance of the truth, that is to say, your belief in Jesus as God's way of salvation. Again, one should review the spiritual blessings in Christ (**1:3-14**). Observe once more the words:

> **In him we were also chosen**, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And **you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation. **Having believed**, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:11-14**).

For Paul, the Ephesian Christians were chosen "in Him." How were they chosen? Were they included "in Him" without regard to their response to the word of truth, that is to say, the gospel of God? Or were they included when they heard the word of truth and believed? Jesus, prior to His ascension, tells the apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:15-16**). Repetition is some times unavoidable when one has to set aside particular entrenched doctrines concerning *predestination* and *election* that has persisted for centuries.

To help unravel tradition and remove spectacles from the eyes, then another citation, as mentioned earlier, from John is appropriate to set the tone once more for what it is that can *exclude* or *include* one in the elect of God. This exact citation is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about salvation and condemnation. Listen to Jesus as he relates to Nicodemus what it is that will condemn or save:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

God sent His Son into the world to save the world. How? Jesus tells Nicodemus it is through belief in Him as the Son of God. If one does not believe then he/she is condemned. God did not predestinate certain individuals to eternal life before the creation of the world without belief in His Son. Again, Peter says essentially the same truth in his first epistle:

> To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood (**1 Peter 1:1-2**).

Who are the elect? According to Peter, the elect are those who are set apart for God through the work of the Holy Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. This is what redemption is all about. God knew before the creation of the world how he would redeem man through Jesus Christ. Thus, salvation is available to anyone who believes. Man's redemption was not an after thought on the part of God. According to Paul, the elect are those "in Christ." For Paul, the elect are those predestined before the creation of the world to be adopted as sons of God through Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 1:4-5**). Paul calls attention to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ as having been predestinated before the creation of the world (**1:7**).

Conclusion

Are you in Christ? If not, then you are not a part of God's elect. If you wish to become a part of the elect, then you must believe in Him. Does God choose some to eternal damnation or some to eternal life without respect to acceptance or rejection of Jesus as the savior of the world? Perhaps, Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household will help to clarify these questions about *predestination* and *election.* Listen to the words of Peter as he speaks to Cornelius and his household about redemption:

> Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right**. You know **the message God sent** to the people of Israel, telling **the good news of peace through Jesus Christ**, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name**." While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So **he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (**Acts 10:34-48**).

Peter states emphatically: "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (**10:34-35**). He also testifies: "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**10:43**). Peter, being conscious of their faith in Jesus, commanded that Cornelius and his household be baptized in the name of Jesus. This command concerning baptism is in response to their faith in Jesus. Peter's words reflect Jesus' last words to His disciples before His ascension into heaven: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is

baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:15-16**).

Predestination and *election* occur only in Christ. These two blessings are Christocentric. There is no reference in the Ephesian letter to personal election of certain individuals, separate and apart from faith in Christ, for the election is corporate, that is to say, in the body of Christ. Do you want to become a part of God's elect? Do you want forgiveness of your sins? Then, you must "fear him and do what is right." You must believe in Him to receive forgiveness of sins and become a part of the elect. Do you believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ? If so, then you must repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Redemption Through His Blood

Thrust Statement: **Jesus sets us free through His blood.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:7-8**

Redemption in Christ (1:7)

As Paul reflects upon adoption and predestination, he bursts forth with excitement of the consequences of these two spiritual blessings. Immediately he launches into implications of the spiritual blessings in Christ—"redemption." Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the essence of redemption: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (**1:7-8**). The word *redemption* (αϛϛπολυψτρωσϊ apolutrwsis) carries within its meaning the idea of deliverance by payment of a price. In Christ, one is liberated from the guilt of sin and from the condemnation of the Law. This release allows one to enter into a life of liberty (**Romans 6:4**). It is "in Him" that God makes redemption possible. In redemption one is set free from fault. Again, Paul reminds the Ephesians that redemption is "through his blood." When one thinks about "His blood," one is immediately reminded of His death upon the cross. Christ's blood reflects the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. The definite article (τηΨν thn) before the word *redemption* signifies that this redemption in Christ is the one and only way of salvation. Jesus has rescued humanity from the just judgment of God.

Ransom Paid by Christ

Jesus accomplished this deliverance through the payment of His own blood when He died upon Calvary. The word *redemption* (apolutrwsis) originally denoted the buying back of a slave or captive, thus making him or her free by payment of a ransom (λυτροψω lutrow, "redeem by paying a ransom, set free, rescue"). The word *ransom* occurred in reference to freed prisoners of war or released slaves. Sin had kept

humanity in bondage and under God's wrath. Sin had formerly kept humanity captive, but Jesus through His death brought redemption for all who respond to God through Himself.

Jesus, in His remarks to the twelve about the greatest in the kingdom of God, spoke of His life as a ransom: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (λαψτρον lutron) for many" (**Matthew 20:28**). Redemption is through His blood. Redemption, forgiveness, and adoption go together. Yes, He paid for our redemption through His sacrifice upon the Tree. The words of Peter should echo within everyone's heart as he or she reflects upon the power of the blood of Christ:

> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

The blood of Christ is more valuable than silver or gold. Forgiveness of sins depends on the blood of Christ. The author of Hebrews writes: "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (**Hebrews 9:22**).

Richness of God's Grace

Forgiveness and redemption result from God's grace: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (**1:7**). As one contemplates God's grace, one is mindful that grace refers to God's uncaused and unmerited and unconditional love in reaching out to sinful humanity. God showed kindness to children of wrath; that is to say, God showed His compassion to us who were dead in transgressions and sin (**2:1**). As pointed out above, one should praise God for His "glorious grace"—"to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (**1:6**).

Following Paul's reflections upon what God accomplished in and through Jesus, he states emphatically that one is saved by grace, not works (**2:8**). Once more, one recalls the words of Paul in **1:7** in which he exclaims: "in accordance with the riches of God's grace." This verse speaks of the wealth of God's grace; that is to say, God's grace is abundant and plentiful. This grace is so rich and overflowing that it sets men and women free from God's wrath (**Romans 5**), from the dominion of sin (**Romans 6**), from the curse of the Law (**Romans 7**), and from condemnation (**Romans 7**).

God's Wisdom and Understanding (1:8)

Paul, as he thinks about God's grace, cries out: "He lavished on us with all wisdom (σοφιψα sofia, "intelligence, skill") and understanding (φροψνησϊ fronhsis, "thought, way of thinking, frame of mind, intention, judgment")" (**Ephesians 1:8**). What did God lavish upon us? He lavished upon us His righteousness, His holiness, and His redemption found in Christ (see **1 Corinthian 1:30**). God's wisdom of justification is found in His means of justifying the corrupt human race. One stands in

amazement, as he or she mulls over the means of justification—justification by faith in His Son, not works. Paul never tires of writing about the means of justification. Pay attention, once more, to the words of Paul to the Romans: "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all" (**Romans 4:16**).

For Paul, this means of justification is not the wisdom of the world, but rather the wisdom of God. Paul speaks of Jesus' crucifixion as God's wisdom. Paul explains God's wisdom this way:

> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. [4] My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, [5] so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5**).

Paul prefaces these remarks with this explanation about God's wisdom: He cuts away all underbrush, as it were, in going right to the heart of the matter of justification on God's part. Take note of the words of Paul as he makes clear this concept to the Corinthians:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom (σοφιψα sofia) from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

Jesus Christ has "become for us wisdom from God." In other words, God makes Jesus our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. This is the reason that no one can boast about his or her salvation, except in the Lord. Listen once more to Paul as he unrolls the richness of God's grace in the scheme of redemption—the wisdom of God:

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, [2] in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. [3] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. [4] But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, [5] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. [6] And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not[9] by works, so that no one can

boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:1-10**).

How does God make us alive? Paul writes, "made us alive with Christ." How does God save us? Again, Paul jots down words that pierce the soul with excitement: "by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works." In **2:1-10**, Paul unfolds God's wisdom of salvation for a sinful people. Not only did Paul address this subject of God's wisdom in Ephesians and Corinthians, but he also explains in greater detail this wisdom from God to the Romans:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. [29] Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too (**Romans 3:21-29**).

How could God be just and, at the same time, justify sinful beings? Since God is just, He must punish sin. On the other hand, God is full of grace. God's answer concerning justice and punishment is Jesus. In God's wisdom, He presented Jesus "as a sacrifice of atonement." If one has faith in the blood of Jesus, God justifies that person because Jesus paid the penalty. Justification is through faith, not works. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice in order to demonstrate His justice. To state this wonderful truth in a nutshell, Jesus is God's wisdom of redemption—"He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

God's wisdom is found in that He makes Christ our righteousness, which refers to the doctrine of justification by faith in Him. Paul's Epistles are peppered with justification by faith in the atonement of Christ upon Calvary through His death. Take note, once more, of the words found in **Galatians 2:21**: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" Not only is Jesus our "wisdom," but He is also our "sanctification." As long as we remain "in Christ," He is our holiness and perfection. Paul does not stop with the words *wisdom* and *sanctification*, but he also employs the word *redemption*, which refers to our deliverance.

In the Roman letter (**3:21-29**), Paul goes to the kernel of God's wisdom—redemption through Jesus Christ. As stated above, in order for God to maintain His justice and, at the same time, justify a sinful civilization, God had to

devise a way to bring about this task of justifying sinful souls. The miracle of this justification is available to those who have faith in His Son. God in His wisdom gave Jesus as atonement for the sins of humanity. When one gets the true picture of the merits of Christ, one will glorify God for this great revelation of God's wisdom and power. For one to have eternal life, one's life must be grounded "in Jesus"; otherwise one is "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (**Ephesians 2:12**).

Forgiveness In Him (1:7)

It is only "in Him" that God grants complete removal of sin—"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (**1:7**). There are other passages from the Older Testament that clarifies this notion of forgiveness. For example, David, as he puts pen to paper, captures this grace of God with clearness: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (**Psalm 103:12**). Over again, Jeremiah, writing about the Messianic Age, declares: "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, 'declares the LORD.' 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more'" (**Jeremiah 31:34**). Yet again, Micah, writing about 735 BC, declares: "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (**Micah 7:19**). Also, John, in his first Epistle, writes: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (**1 John 1:9**).

CONCLUSION

This grace and this forgiveness elicit praise to God. The marvel of it all brings forth praise form the twenty-four elders in heaven: "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'" (**Revelation 5:9**). How do you feel about praise for salvation? Do you stand in admiration of God's way of justification? What is your reaction to God's forgiveness through the Cross of Jesus? Do you spurn God's love by your lifestyle? Do you seek to bring every area of your life into captivity to Christ?

What about your language? Are your words seasoned with grace (**Ephesians 4:29**)? Are you kind and forgiving (**4:32**)? Can people see Christ in you (**1 Timothy 4:11-12**)? What does redemption mean to you? Do you praise God for salvation through election in Christ Jesus? Are you living a life of love (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**)? If one stands in wonder of God's wisdom, if one stands in amazement of God's election, if one stands in amazement of God's adoption, if one stands in astonishment of God's redemption, and if one stands in awe of God's forgiveness, then one seeks to incorporate into his or her life the admonition of Paul toward the end of the Ephesian Epistle (**Ephesians 4:22—5:7**). Keep your mind on the following instructions that gives evidence that you stand in admiration of God's grace—the giving of His Son (**John 3:16**):

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24] and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. [25] Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. [26] "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27] and do not give the devil a foothold. [28] He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. [29] Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (**Ephesians 4:22-32**).

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [3] But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. [5] For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. [7] Therefore do not be partners with them (**5:1-7**).

saints -in- christ Jesus

Thrust Statement: **Every Christian stands apart and is unique and is separated from the world.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:1-3**

> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Paul begins this epistle with: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (**Ephesians 1:1**).[1] The apostle Paul gives a description of every believer. This passage is important in that it immediately calls attention to the Christian's status_"saints." Christians are rather reluctant to utilize the word *saint* in their description of themselves. The word *saint* is normally associated with someone who has been canonized by a religious organization. One often visualizes a saint as an individual who is extremely devout with a halo about his/her head. But Paul does not employ the word *saint* in that sense.

God's people are accustomed to saying, "I am a Christian," but they are afraid to say, "I am a saint." This confusion is over a misunderstanding of the word *saint*. For Paul, a saint is one who is separated from the world to God. In other words, a saint is one who is set apart for the service of God. Every Christian is taken out of the world and is given uniqueness by God. It is in this vein that Peter writes:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people,

> but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

The Christians at Oakwood Hills' church[2] are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." This is Peter's definition of Christians. In one sense they were a people among other people and yet they were different. This term is used to describe one who has put his/her trust in Jesus Christ. Every Christian is in the world physically, but not of the world spiritually. Saints are individuals who are set apart by God. In other words, the believer is one who is segregated from the world to serve God. God is the One who sanctifies; God is the One who sets apart; God is the One who justifies. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says essentially the same thing about God's role in our separation.

> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Galatians 1:3-5**).

Every Christian is delivered out of the world; every Christian is separated from the world. The saint is someone who has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. In the Colossian letter, Paul captures the very essence of forgiveness: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (**Colossians 1:13-14**). Sin separates from God. Isaiah thundered this note of alarm to the children of Israel: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God" (**Isaiah 59:2**). Before anyone can be separated FOR God, he or she must be cleansed from the guilt of sin.

John the apostle, in the Book of Revelation, calls attention to the way sins are cleansed: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father_to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (**Revelation 1:5-6**). Peter also calls attention to this cleansing by the blood of Christ: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

But this cleansing does not abrogate the need for obedience to the gospel of God. It is still necessary to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your mind; It is still necessary to love your neighbor as yourself. Every Christian must present himself or herself as a living sacrifice to God. Listen to Paul as he encourages the believers in Rome to put into practice holy living:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God_this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is_his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Peter also reminds the Christians scattered throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (**1 Peter 1:1**) to practice holiness as their way of life:

> Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (**1:13-16**).

Every Christian is a saint; you cannot be a Christian without being a saint. You cannot be a Christian and not be alienated from the world in some far-reaching sense. There is a severance that has taken place in your mind, in your outlook, in your heart, in your conversation, and in your behavior. Is there a change in your way of life? Is there a change in the way you think? Is there a change in your conversation? Is there a change in the way you treat other people? Is there a change in the way you treat your wife? Is there a change in the way you treat your husband? Is there a change in the way you treat your children? Is there a change in the way you think? Paul reminds the Christians at Colossae:

> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

Paul is telling the Colossians that not only must they SEEK heaven, but they must also THINK heaven. Where is your mind? Is it upon worldly things? Or is it upon spiritual things? This is very similar to the words of Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it:Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:37-40**). How do you measure up to this admonition of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind? If you love God this way, there will be a change in your total behavior. One cannot live a life of sin and expect to inherit the kingdom of God. Paul writes forcefully to the churches in the province of Galatia to avoid sinful behavior:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Galatians 5:19-21**).

Are you guilty of the works of the flesh? Are you guilty of "drunkenness"? Are you guilty of "fits of rage"? Are you guilty of "sexual immorality"? Are you guilty of "selfish ambition"? If so, then you must repent of these sins and serve God. In this same epistle, Paul enumerates ethical behavior that is in harmony with the Holy Spirit:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:22-26**).

Paul also wrote to the Colossians about ethical behavior. In fact, he encourages them to clothe themselves with the following characteristics:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (**Colossians 3:12-14**).

Have you "put on love" that brings all things into unqualified harmony. Are you a Christian who feels rather hopeless about a husband or wife or child or some other relative? Do you feel there is no hope for these individuals? Do you remember the saints in Ephesus? Do you remember the saints in Corinth? Do you remember the saints in Galatia? One should never forget that the gospel is the power of God. It has accomplished many things and is still doing so. The words of Paul to the Corinthians are quite informative as to the effectiveness of God's gospel.

> Do you not realise that people who do evil will never inherit the kingdom of God? Make no mistake_the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the self-indulgent, sodomites, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers, none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you used to be of that kind: but you have been washed clean, you have been sanctified, and you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**).

Has your conversion to Jesus Christ made a difference in your walk with God? If Paul had written to the church here at Oakwood Hills, he would have written, as he did to the Corinthians: "to the church of God in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, to those who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be God's holy people, with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord as well as ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**1 Corinthians 1:2-3**). May God help each of you to remember the words of Paul to the saints in Rome: "Once you were slaves of sin, but thank God you have given whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching to which you were introduced; and so, being freed from serving sin, you took uprightness as your master" (**Romans 6:17-18**).

As we conclude this message about Saints in Christ Jesus, I would like to encourage everyone to remember the words of Paul to the saints in Philippi:

> Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure,

everything that we love and admire_with whatever is good and praiseworthy. Keep doing everything you learnt from me and were told by me and have heard or seen me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (**Philippians 4:8-9**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] For the benefit of the Internet readers, the Oakwood Hills Church is located in DeFuniak Springs, FL. Even though this message is addressed to the saints at Oakwood Hills, nevertheless, this sermon is addressed to all of God's people.

Singing and Playing: Ephesians 5:19

Thrust statement: **Paul exhorts Christians to sing and play to the Lord.**

Scripture reading: **Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16**

> We are heirs of the "Fathers," of medieval theologians, of the Reformers, and of the Puritans. To deny such inheritance is to deny our faith. But to claim a historic faith also means to claim one that is constantly moving toward God's future, and therefore we must learn to claim our inheritance in such a way that it is a help rather than a hindrance in our march toward the future. In other words, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us. To do this in the case of Scripture is the primary task of a preacher of liberation.[1]

Within the Churches of Christ, the issue of instrumental music in the so-called worship service is a source of division among equally godly men and women—some in favor, others not. This essay is an analysis of James Burton Coffman's article: "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music."[2] The first part of this study focuses on the principles of interpretation and the last part of this investigation concentrates on the arguments set forth by Coffman against instrumental music. My examination of Coffman's composition is not to question the integrity of this godly man, but rather to scrutinize his points to see if his opinions are compelling in his rejection of instrumental music—a position that most Christians within the Churches of Christ uphold. This paper will focus primarily upon the arguments presented by Coffman, not judgments expressed by others who are also in opposition to instrumental music.

Two Scriptures that many of the Churches of Christ rely upon to uphold their views concerning the rejection of instrumental music surrounds **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16**.[3] These two Scriptures are cited by many well-meaning Christians to substantiate their beliefs that it is sinful for Christians to "sing and play" in the corporate assembly of God's people. Coffman, for example, denies the word *play*, or *make music*, as set forth in **Ephesians 5:19**. He writes: "It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not to make music."[4] These two passages are frequently viewed as Scriptures to regulate singing without the use of the instrument in a so-called worship service.[5] For

one to praise God with instruments during the gathering of the saints on Sunday morning is tantamount to rebellion against God. In fact, to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music is high treason against God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. God will send, according to some believers, one to an eternal burning hell if one dares to praise Him or Christ with instrumental accompaniment. According to Coffman, as well as many other Christians, one cannot sing and play, but only sing (a capella).[6]

Ephesians 5:19 is generally interpreted as a "worship service" text.[7] In other words, Paul wrote this text in order to regulate the kind of singing within the assembly, not outside the church. One may praise God with instruments, providing one is not worshipping God during a church service. When the church assembles between the hours of 10am and 11am for Sunday morning worship, the congregations must sing without the accompaniment of instruments, which constitutes one of the five-acts of worship.[8] Why? Some Christians assert that God forbids His people to praise Him with the instrument when they assemble as a corporate body for corporate worship.

Worship: One's Way of Life

Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that **Ephesians 5:19** deals with one's way of life twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday morning worship. If one is to identify with this particular verse, one must first learn the whole book in context before postulating his or her interpretation of **5:19**. If one fails to read this book as a book, one can draw conclusions that are not sound. An understanding of the whole helps one to be aware of the part. The task of every interpreter is to seek to know the one specific meaning intended by the author. An author helps his readers to recognize his meaning through its context. Francis W. Beare correctly calls attention to the context in his exegesis of this passage:

> **19-20**. Spiritual fullness comes to expression in joyful fellowship, in song, in perpetual thanksgiving. The Christian's whole life, when it is given its true direction, moves in the atmosphere of worship. In the context the words cannot refer to the meetings for public worship alone or even primarily, but to everyday social intercourse. The whole expression is modeled on Col. 3:16-17; but **addressing one another** suggest the general relationships of life over a broader area than the "teaching and admonishing" of the Colossians passage.[9]

Also, Theodore O. Wedel, co-author with Bear, draws attention to the error of limiting this text to the "architectural" building and "Sunday worship":

> But here, as so often, we make the mistake of limiting the concept of church and religion to their architectural expression in a house of God or to our Sunday worship. Have we not also parish halls and cottage parlors and a common life of Christian fellowship on weekdays? Must Christian **singing and making melody** be restricted to our rightly decorous worship hours? And as for **giving thanks always for all things unto God**—this can surely find social expression in games and picnics and singing around a campfire.[10]

Wedel also bemoans the travesty of limiting **Ephesians 5:19** to special hours. He writes:

> Is it not a tragic misreading of the Christian faith that all of us are inclined to relegate "religion" to special hours or seasons and to appointed pieties? Churchgoing and prayer hours are a necessity for the Christian life. Woe unto us if we neglect them. They are the time for listening to the word of God which will clarify for us his will. But the doing of his will is both costing and rewarding in the *now* of every day.[11]

INTERPRETATION: CONCEPTUAL GRIDS

Before one embarks upon an analysis of Coffman's essay against instrumental music and an interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19**, a word of caution is given in order to help one approach the text without colored glasses—consciousness of one's traditions as one approaches the text. It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach every text with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of his or her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One's interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose one's own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19**.

For many believers, this Scripture is a verse that regulates corporate singing in an assembly on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Through a sleight of hand, this passage is cited in such a way that instrumental music is eliminated from the believer's life of worship or praise, except when it is outside the church building. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts."[12]

Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[13] Hermeneutics[14] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.[15] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and "now."[16] Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt "to reach an informed understanding of the text."[17] This essay is an attempt to reach an informed understanding of the text by looking at the whole and then the particular. The traditional interpretation, among many Christians within the Churches of Christ, is so entrenched in the thinking of men and women that many can no longer distinguish between tradition and the Word of God itself. Everyone should weigh carefully his or her tradition in the light of God's Word. Jaroslav Pelikan calls attention to the necessity of rethinking cherished traditions:

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy

development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[18]

It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the "linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings," writes Cedric Johnson.[19] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. L. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution when he writes:

> The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.[20]

EXAMINATION OF BURTON COFFMAN'S ESSAY

As stated above, this examination of Coffman's article is not to question the sincerity of this man of God. The primary purpose is to help individuals who are struggling with this issue, to make a more accurate interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19** in order to bring about more unity among God's people. To set the tone for a clearer understanding of **Ephesian 5:19**, I have chosen to review Coffman's article written against the use of the instrument in praise to God.[21] His essay is chosen as an example to illustrate the lengths that individuals will resort to in order to uphold one's own "interpretative community." It is obvious that Coffman allows tradition to stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical texts. Every interpreter must exercise caution that he or she does not prune or crop the text to fit one's theological presuppositions. Every believer must learn to reinterpret and to reevaluate the customs handed down through the centuries. It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their "interpretative community" with the Word of God itself. It is in this regard that Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed "What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."[22]

Christians often accept what they are taught without question. It is in this sense that their interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, they have never taken the time to employ their minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for themselves, nor have they looked at the Scriptures objectively. Their interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."[23] Their interpretations are hand-me-downs from their interpretative community. It is in this same vein that Stanley Fish rightly says, "In other words, interpretive communities[24] are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."[25] In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

> And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks

> means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.[26]

Leaders, especially minister within the Churches of Christ, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But frequently their interpretation is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the Biblical text.[27] Once more, the Gonzalezs' caution: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[28] It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background. It is also in this vein that O. E. Payne writes about the acceptance of arguments against instrumental music without regard to an examination of long-held traditions:

> Most men in like positions, instead of dismissing prejudice and divesting themselves of the warp and woof of long years of custom and environment, preparatory to open-minded research, have passionately rushed to the defense of that to which they have been accustomed, resorting to the Scriptures with no loftier purpose than to search for proof or pretext with which to bolster the doctrine or practice which is questioned.[29]

Some religious writers within the Churches of Christ suppose they have all the answers. And as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. One must be careful that one does not go to the Scriptures to prove what one already believes, but rather to see what they say. Many are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between interpretation and Revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.[30]

This failure to discriminate between explanation and Divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative. One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.[31]

People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one's preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One's own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One's prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.[32] The culture of one's heritage controls the text of the Bible. One should never forget that one's own journey occurs within a vast architecture of

preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

> My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[33]

ANALYSIS OF JAMES BURTON COFFMAN'S "THE SINFUL USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC"

Pagan Society: First and Fourth Arguments

Coffman's first and fourth arguments against instrumental music surrounds paganism. Since the pagans used instruments in their gatherings, therefore, God and Christ do not approve instruments in either the Old Testament or New Testament, according to Coffman.[34] Having set forth the basic principles of how to interpret the Word of God, as discussed above, it is now appropriate to examine Coffman's essay to see if he followed the fundamental principles of interpretation or if he allowed his prejudices to blind his eyes to a careful reading of **Ephesians 5:19**. Since his arguments are presented in written form in the *Gospel Advocate*, it is appropriate to deal with his views in order to see if his arguments are sound logically and biblically. Many Christians do not have the background of knowing how to deal with his outlook. Since, I, too, taught many of these same views for over seventeen years in the early part of my ministry among the one-cup and nonSunday School movement, I am qualified to examine the arguments—positive or negative. On the surface his points of view may seem sound, but, at the same time, a closer examination reveals carelessness on his part in the handling of several texts to support his presuppositions.

As stated above, this analysis of Coffman's article in no way questions his integrity and his sonship to God. But a perusal of his essay does illustrate the scale to which Christians will violate the text, even though not intentionally, in order to uphold tradition. His approach against instrumental music is extremely weak—even to the point of denying that God commanded musical instruments in **2 Chronicles 29:25**.[35] He begins his tirade against "mechanical musical instruments in the worship of God" by calling attention to its use in a pagan society. He states rather boldly his opposition: "Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly! There is not the slightest doubt of this."[36] How does he conclude that instrumental music is sinful? He states categorically his objection with absolute certainty of its sinfulness. Listen to him as he prepares his readers for his examination, "Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty."[37]

How does he know for certain that his views are correct? Pay attention to him as he seeks to justify his negative reaction to the use of instruments. His first argument almost causes one to just stand in shock as he or she peruses his reasoning—pagans used instruments. This argument almost shocks the imagination. This argument is one

of the weakest arguments against instrumental music that has ever come to my attention. In the development of this argument, he calls attention to the use of mechanical instruments of music in pagan temples and Nebuchdnezzar's employment of musical instruments (**Daniel 3:5**). From this he assumes that Jesus forbids the "worship of God with mechanical instruments of music."[38]

Response to Coffman's Pagan Society Argument

Is the use of instruments sinful simply because one finds the employment of mechanical instruments in a secular society? Coffman advances the notion that since instrumental music is utilized in a pagan society, then God condemns the use of the instrument in praise to Him. This argument is extremely weak in the light of God's Word. For instance, one cannot help but wonder about David and his instruments of music utilized in the Temple to praise God. Toward the end of David's life, he called in the leaders of Israel, the priests, and the Levites—a total of thirty-eight thousand men (**1 Chronicles 23:1-2**). Of this number called in by David, four thousand were chosen to "praise the Lord with the musical instruments" that David had "provided for that purpose" (**23:5**).

The Chronicler also reveals that David, together with some of the commanders of the army, set apart "some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service" (**25:1**). The sons of Asaph, the sons of Jeduthun, and the sons of Heman were assigned the task of "thanking and praising the Lord" with the "harp" (**25:2-4**). After the enumeration of the sons of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, the Chronicler writes:

> All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288. Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties (**25:6-9**).

If one thinks that God was not behind this use of musical instruments to praise Him, then one only has to read **2 Chronicles 29:25** to quickly see that it was God who instructed David, not a fertile imagination of David's own devising. This chapter records the purification of the Temple by Hezekiah. The Chronicler clearly states: "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD just as his father David had done" (**29:2**). In the recounting of the events that occurred in the purification of the Temple, the author of **Second Chronicles** reveals the use of instruments in praise to God. Listen as he calls attention to the ultimate source of the authority for this action of the introduction of musical instruments:

> He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by

> trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed (**2 Chronicles 29:25-29**).

Contrary to the thinking of Coffman,[39] the Chronicler says that the source of authority behind the use of the instruments was God Himself: "commanded by the LORD" (**29:25**). How did God command the employment of instruments? Again, the Chronicler says, "through his prophets" (**29:25**). Who were His prophets? The record says that they were David, Gad, and Nathan. Does this sound as if instruments were a stench in the nostrils of God because pagans also employed instruments in their everyday life? In Coffman's efforts to nullify the force of **2 Chronicles 29:25**, he develops two arguments under the caption: "Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use." He writes,

> 'But they did it in the Old Testament.' All advocates of the use of such instruments in Christian worship invariably quote 2 Chronicles 29:25, which in the common versions does indicate that God commanded their use. In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic version."

He wants to deny this passage since it does not fit his theology. Should one also discount where the Chronicler says, "The Levites and priests sang to the Lord every day, accompanied by the Lord's instruments of praise" (**2 Chronicles 30:21**). The instruments in **29:25** are called the "Lord's instruments" in **30:21**. Earlier this same Chronicler wrote: "The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, 'His love endures forever'" (**7:6**). Should this verse, too, be eliminated from the Scriptures in order to fit one's objection to instrumental music? **2 Chronicles 7:6** is associated with the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon. Should this Scripture be eliminated from the Bible?

As one examines Coffman's arguments, one quickly observes that this kind of illogical reasoning is the same illogical reasoning that Jesus experienced with the religious leaders in His day over traditions, which ultimately ended in the crucifixion of Jesus. Traditions take precedence over what God has said. Coffman cannot distinguish, so it seems, between his customs and the Word of God. In fact, he nullifies the Word of God through his inherited traditions from the Stone/Campbell Movement. When he writes: "Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly!" Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty."[40] Once more, how does he prove that instruments of music are sinful?

His first and fourth arguments are, as stated above, one and the same, focus on the pagan use of instruments. He states his opposition in clear terms: "The whole world in Bible times was full of mechanical instruments of music, and the pagan temples were loaded with their orchestras."[41] He thus reasons that God was not behind the use of instruments. Further more, he indicates that God condemned David for the use of instruments—he then based his arguments upon a misapplication of **Amos 5:23** and **6:5**.[42] Is David condemned because He commanded instruments in the Temple? Is

God condemned because He commanded David, along with some other prophets, to institute musical instruments in praise to Himself? One wonders if God knew that the pagans were using instruments. Well, perhaps God was sleeping when all this took place! Perhaps, God had not reasoned this issue out very carefully?

The Pattern Concept for a Worship Service:
Singing Excludes Instruments
Pattern Theology: Second Argument

His second argument hinges on pattern theology.[43] In other words, "pattern theology" is the belief that God has ordained a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be true worship. For Coffman, worship is "prescriptive," not "descriptive." He views any passage that describes activities in the assembly as prescriptive—five unalterable rituals. For one to deviate from his supposed rituals (acts or elements), one faces the fires of hell. He labors under the impression that objection to instrumental music is based on the New Testament, not tradition as some say. He then seeks to answer the argument that "The banning of mechanical instruments is more of a tradition than something based on Scripture."[44] To refute the argument that the rejection of instrumental music is based on tradition, not Scripture, Coffman then relies upon **Hebrews 8:5** to prove that mechanical instruments are not in harmony with the divine pattern for a worship service: "It is the New Testament, not tradition, that prescribes a pattern for Christian worship (Hebrews 8:5)."[45]

There is not one word in **Hebrews 8:5** about five acts of worship for a Christian assembly. This deduction is a figment of a very fertile imagination. There is not one Scripture found in the New Testament that speaks of Christian meetings as a worship service. The Christian assemblies appear to be based on the synagogue meetings—meetings in the synagogue were not prescriptive, but descriptive. In other words, they were left open as to the elements/acts of the gatherings. This was not true of the Temple. This passage in **Hebrews 8:5** had to do with the Tabernacle—later Solomon's Temple. On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the instructions to construct the sanctuary—a sanctuary representative, or copy, of what was in heaven--prescriptive.

He assumes that God has prescribed a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner, but he cites no Scripture—in context—that supports his conclusions. He cites **Hebrews 8:5** out of context in order to prove his presupposition that God has ordained a pattern for a worship service in the New Testament.[46] After misapplying **Hebrews 8:5**, he then asserts: "Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music was only prescribed and allowed by the holy apostles (emphasis mine—RDB)."[47] He discounts **Ephesians 5:19** in which Paul explicitly tells the Ephesians to sing and "make music," or play. He says, "Thus, when the Scriptures say, 'Sing,' it was not necessary to add, 'but don't play musical instruments.'"[48] In this second argument against instrumental music, he drops in this unbelievable statement that also demands a response. One almost stands aghast as one reads his words:

> It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not make music (emphasis

> mine—RDB). Only ignorance can confuse these terms. Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music only was prescribed and allowed by the holy apostles.[49]

Did Paul exclude the instrument in praise to God? Did he say that the Ephesians were to sing and not to play instruments? Perhaps, a study of The Greek word psallw will clarify the confusion. The verb psallw is employed in the New Testament as expressing praise. The verb psallw has its primary meaning '"to sing' with at least the possible nuance of 'to sing' with instrumental accompaniment."[50] The New Testament writers employ the word ψαλμός (psalmos) in two senses: (1) the Old Testament psalms, and (2) songs of praise and joy.[51] For example, Paul in writing to the Romans declares:

> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise (yalw' psalw, "I will sing praise"[52]) you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name" (**Romans 15:8-9**).

By the use of the word *psalmos*, Paul is not excluding instruments, even though the singing may be without musical accompaniment. The citation, in **Romans 15:9**, is from **Psalm 18:49**, which appears to be a Psalm sung with instruments. This statement of Paul is about Christ's ministry to the Jews to confirm God's mercy to the Gentiles. Just as David praised God for his victory over the surrounding nations, so Christ celebrates His victory over satanic powers that brings about redemption for the Gentiles.

Because of God's mercy, Jesus is saying, "I will praise (ψαλῶ' psalw) you among the Gentiles," and "I will sing hymns to your name." This is not related just to the congregational gathering of the corporate body of believers, but also to individuals in their every day walk with God. This perception of God's mercy is one of the reasons that Christians sing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. This outburst of joy, assembled or not assembled, is to praise God for His mercy. Paul and Silas' singing in prison is an example of this explosion of joy in song to God (**Acts 16:25**). Prior to Paul calling upon the Ephesians to "sing and make music," he burst forth in rapturous language to capture the hearts of men and women in gratitude.

> Praise εὐλογητός, euloghtos, "blessed") be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In

> him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).

Ephesians 5:19 is reminiscent of the praise in **Ephesians 1:3-14**. Again, one also finds the word psallw employed by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I also will pray with my mind; I will sing (yalw' psalw, "I will sing praise") with my spirit, but I will also sing (yalw' psalw, "I will sing praise") with my mind" (**1 Corinthians 14:15**). As one reflects upon this verse, one is conscience that the word yallw' (psallw, "to pluck, pull") is employed in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament—translated between 285—250 BC) to translate the Hebrew word /g^^n` (n`g~n, "to play a stringed instrument") and rm~z` (z`m~r, "to make music in praise to God").[53] The usage of psallw in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word n`g~n twelve times. On the other hand, the word psallw in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word z`m~r forty times.[54]

Did Paul exclude the use of instruments in his use of the word psallw? There is no evidence from the context that Paul excluded instrumental accompaniment, but rather the reverse is obvious. Every Christian's life should be one of praise. Every believer's life should be one of praising God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for God's unsearchable love. In Paul's letters to the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae, he compares the behavior of the unbeliever with the believer. Toward the close of the Ephesian Epistle, he writes that they were to "sing and make music":

> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing (a[/donte", adontes) and make music (yavllonte", psallontes) in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 5:15-21**).

As stated above, many Christians still associate **Ephesians 5:19** with public worship, but there is nothing, as stated above, in the context to identify this as an act that only takes place on Sunday morning between 9am and 10am. While this verse no doubt includes activities that take place in the corporate assembly, the text does not suggest such a restriction.[55] Believers are to instruct one another through psalms (yalmoi'", psalmois), hymns (u{mnoi", Jumois) and spiritual songs (wj/dai'", wdais). Paul encouraged them to "sing and make music." The words *sing and make music* are from the Greek words a[/donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallontes), which is translated by R. C. H. Lenski as "singing and playing."[56]

Lenski further states: "Singing is done by the voice; playing by means of an instrument. ψαλλω means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice."[57] In other words, the Christians at Ephesus were to "sing and make music."[58] This would be applicable not just to formal (corporate) worship, but also on other occasions. Paul's use of the word Psalms appears to refer to the Old Testament psalms.[59] This analysis of the Greek and Hebrew words sets forth the argument that this line of reasoning is the most logical conclusion, since this book, as well as the other thirty-eight books, was looked upon as the Word of God (see **2 Timothy 3:14-17**).[60]

The writers of the New Testament cite the psalms frequently. For example, Luke records a conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders in which Jesus cited from **Psalm 110** (**Luke 20:41-44**). Also, Jesus, before His ascension, called attention to the Psalms in His farewell instructions to the disciples (**Luke 24:44**). Prior to the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a group numbering about one hundred and twenty and cited from two psalms (**Acts 1:20-21**): "For," said Peter, "it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' [**Psalm 69:25**] and again he pens: 'May another take his place of leadership'" [**Psalm 109:8**]

Yet again, when Paul proclaimed the good news to those in Pisidian Antioch, he cited **Psalm 2:7**: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (**Acts 13:33**). The Book of Psalms is one of the most frequently quoted books in the New Testament. Paul not only instructed the Ephesians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but he added the phrase, "sing and make music" (a[/donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallontes), contrary to Coffman's views. To cite Coffman once more, "Only ignorance can confuse these terms."[61] He admits that singing is not the same as to "make music,"
which is correct. A well-known Lutheran scholar (Lenski) translates psallontes as "playing." Why did Lenski translate the word psallontes as "playing"? Before responding to this question, perhaps it would be helpful to observe what Charles Hodge has written:

> a[/donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallontes), singing and making melody, are two forms of expressing the same thing. The latter term is the more comprehensive; as αι[δειν (aidein, "to sing"—RD Burdette) is to make music with the voice; ψαλλειν (psallein, "to play"—RD Burdette), to make music in any way; literally, to play on a stringed instrument; then, to sing in concert with such an instrument; then, to sing or chant. See 1 Cor. 14, 15; James, 5, 13; Rom. 15, 9.[62]

Is there any evidence for translating the word psallontes as "playing"? To help solve the problem of translation, it would be helpful to examine a passage in **First Samuel** in which David was summoned to comfort Saul:

> Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to

search for someone who can play the harp (r/NKiB' ÷G«n"m], m+n~gg}n B~kkh!nnor). He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you , will feel better." So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me." One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play (÷G«n" ['deyœ y) d}~a n~gg}n) the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him" (**1 Samuel 16:14-18**).

The Hebrew words in **First Samuel**: "can play the harp" is translated into the Greek text as eijdovta yavllein ejn kinuvra/[63] (eidota psallein en kinura, "skilled to play on the harp"). The Greek word psallein ("to play") is equivalent to the Hebrew word m+n~gg}n ("play"). Then the phrase "know how to play" (y)d}~a n~gg}n) is translated into the Septuagint Greek text as eijdovta yalmovn (eidota psalmon, "understands playing on the harp"). Thus, when Paul told the Ephesians to engage in adontes ("singing") kai psallontes ("psalming"), he is utilizing a word (psallontes) that the Jewish Christians in Ephesus understood.[64]

The believers at Ephesus were encouraged to "sing and play," frequently translated as "make melody." Since the Septuagint was the Bible utilized by Jesus and the apostles, it is logical that they would have employed the word psallontes as the Jews currently understood it. The translators of the Septuagint utilized the Greek word psalmon ("playing on the harp") to express the Hebrew word m+n~gg}n ("play"). When Paul says, "sing and make music (psallontes)," is he not reflecting upon musical composition associated with the Psalms?

It is significant, at least to this author, that Paul, in the Ephesian epistle, unlike the Colossian epistle, adds an additional thought. In the Ephesian letter, he says to "sing and make music," but in the epistle to the Colossians, he only says, "sing." Consider the following parallel:

EPHESIANS 5:19-20	**COLOSSIANS 3:16-17**
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.	Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Does the phrase "sing psalms" in Colossians convey the same admonition that Paul expresses in "sing and make music"? The word "sing," even today does not exclude "making music" through instruments. It is not uncommon for individuals to invite someone to go and hear individuals—quartets—sing, but it is understood that just the mention of the word "singing" does not exclude mechanical music. "Make music" is a common term among musicians to mean to "play" instruments along with their singing.

Paul says that this "singing and making music" is to be "in your heart to the Lord."[65] How were they to give thanks? Paul says with "singing and playing." But, Paul added the prepositional phrase, "in your heart to the Lord." In other words, this singing and playing on instruments should not be mechanical. It is to be done with your hearts, that is to say, not merely with your lips and with your fingers. One sings and plays with his heart when he excites his mind to an understanding of the sentiments presented in the words repeated. This expression attached to "singing and playing" is very similar to the words found in **1 Chronicles 13:8** concerning David and assembled Israel in their rejoicing about the return of the Ark of the Covenant: "David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets."

Whether one says, "in your heart to the Lord" or "with all their might," one is saying the same thing. Moses also said to the children of Israel concerning their devotion to God and His Law: "And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (**Deuteronomy 10:12**). When David exhorted his son Solomon about the building of the temple, he said:

> And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. (**1 Chronicles 28:9**)

Paul, in the Ephesian Epistle, varies this expression in order to drive home the necessity of doing one's "singing and playing" from the soul, not just the mouth. Listen once more to Paul as he addresses the servants of earthly masters: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (**Ephesians 6:5**). Again, he writes: "Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart" [ἐκ ψυχῆς, ek yuxhs, "from the soul"] (**6:6**). The words of Peter also call attention to the inward versus the external: "Love one another deeply from the heart" [ἐκ καρδίας, ek kardias] (**1 Peter 1:22**).

This thought—in your heart—is very similar to the words of Paul, as cited above, to the Corinthians: "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (**1 Corinthians 14:15**). Paul is saying, in essence, that the whole soul of men and women should be filled with praise. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be sung with a spirit of thankfulness, which spirit permeates the believer's singing and playing—corporately or individually.

Amos and Instrumental Music

Under the caption "Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use, he develops three additional arguments to substantiate his belief system about instrumental music. His first argument under this caption focuses on **Amos 5:23** and **6:5**). Coffman cites **Amos 5:23** and **6:5** to justify his position that instrumental music is sinful. He writes: "Furthermore, we must point out that Amos condemned the use of instruments in the

Old Testament: 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols' (5:23; cf. 6:5)."[66] Goebel Music (associated with the Churches of Christ), also makes this same argument against the use of Instrumental music.[67] As one seeks to unravel his convoluted reasoning, it is necessary to call attention to the proper method of exegesis. The task of any interpreter is to discover the intended meaning of the author. The way an author helps his readers to interpret his statements is through his context. If one isolates a passage from its context, one can arrive at a meaning that is totally foreign to the author's intent. If one wishes to understand what Amos meant in a particular verse, the reader must examine the way the author thinks and writes in the verses preceding and following his statements. **Amos 5:23** and **6:5** are anchored in history. One cannot separate the historical setting of the author without destroying the intended message. Is it possible to understand these two texts? Yes, Amos' meaning is available and can be understood from his book. Interpreters need to learn how to read a book as a book. As one seeks to uncover the meaning of any text, one should never read isolated passages divorced from its historical background. In the examination of these two texts, this study now focuses upon these two verses separately.

Amos 5:23

Amos 5:23 is a favorite text among many Christians within the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ. Misapplication, in my judgment, is not deliberate on the part of those who cite this verse to give credence to their opposition to instrumental music, but an honest mistake of the heart. An important rule of interpretation of any text is to approach the text with a sound historical treatment. One has to look at the writers of both the Old and New Testaments with a detached eye; that is to say, one must learn to look at the various Scriptures from a neutral standpoint and to see the historical background and to hear the historical Word as it was uttered to the first audience. Many Christians do violence to the historical context in justifying their presuppositions. In the following explanation of this text (**5:23**) as well as **6:5**, one must take into consideration the relevance of the historical details leading up to a particular statement.

There are two different contexts for each of these isolated Scriptures. **Amos 5:23** is associated with the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and **6:5** is associated with both the nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Amos writes: "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps" (**5:23**). The best choirs may have sung their songs, but to God their music was simply noise. The Israelites worship had become meaningless and empty. When one approaches this text with certain presuppositions against instrumental music, this text appears to give validity to one's beliefs.[68] The background leading up to this terse statement deals with ritual punctiliousness, even to the point of excess. Just a casual reading of Chapter 4 and 5 reveals worship that is "soulless worship"—worship that was no longer pleasing to God. God, through Amos, states His opposition to that He had earlier commanded:

> I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. [22] Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,[a] I will have no regard

for them. [23] Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. [24] But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (**5:21-24**).

The nation of Israel had turned their hearts from God, and they were using their "religious feast," their "assemblies," their "burnt offering and grain offerings," their "fellowship offering," and their "instruments" to praise God in a soulless fashion—only mechanical. The Israelites, like so many Christians today, used religion as an emotionless means to stay, hopefully, in God's grace. The Lord is interested in the heart as well as the mind. It is in this same vein that Jesus responded to an individual who tested Him about the greatest commandment in the Law:

> Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] [40] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (**Matthew 22:37-40**)

The Israelites failed in all three. Fifteen hundred years after Moses penned these words (**Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18**), Paul, too, desired the Ephesians to "sing and make music in your heart (τῇ καρδίᾳ, th kardia, "with the heart") to the Lord" (**Ephesians 5:19**). The *Revised Standard Version* renders this phrase as "with all your heart." William Barclay in his *the New Testament: A New Translation* translates: "with all your heart." Edgar J. Goodspeed in his *The Bible: An American Translation* also translates: "with all your heart." Also, James Moffatt in his *The New Testament: A New Translation* renders this phrase as "praise the Lord heartily." The case in Greek can be either dative, locative, or instrumental. The sense of this phrase in context is "with the heart." This sense is also found in a parallel passage in Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (**Colossians 3:16**). Even if one translates th kardia as locative ("in the heart"), the meaning is still "with the heart." Just a comparison of **Colossians 3:16** with Ephesians **5:19** settles the matter—"with gratitude in your hearts."

In the Ephesian Epistle, Paul calls attention to the ethical behavior that a servant should exhibit toward his owner or master. He writes: "doing the will of God from your heart" (**Ephesians 6:6**). The phrase "from your heart" is a translation of the Greek, which is literally translated "from [the] soul" (ἐκ ψυχῆς, ek yuxhs). **Psalm 111:1** also captures the expression ("with all your heart"): "I will extol the LORD with all my heart." When the ark of God was being moved from Abinadab's house on a new cart, the Chronicler pens: "David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets (**1 Chronicles 13:8**). Another psalm of David also expresses the thought of Paul in **Ephesians 5:19**. Listen to David: "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart" (**Psalm 138:1**).[69]

The context of **Amos 5:23** sets forth God's attitude about observance of the things commanded by Him when one's lifestyle is totally contrary to love—love for God and love for one's neighbor. Many Israelites labored under the impression that if

they attended their "solemn assemblies" with their punctilious observance of the rituals commanded by God, then all things would be okay. They failed to understand that what God really desires is the person, not their rituals. Even though the offerings were important aspects of their Levitical heritage, nevertheless, the Lord rejected his own institutions and his instruments of music. These rituals gave its performers a false a sense of security. They had rejected the very heart of the Law. In fact, God taunted them, as it were, to sin:

> "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.[b] 5 Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign LORD (**AMOS 4:4-5**).

Later, God says, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies" (**5:21**). These activities became the focus of God's hatred because they furthered the false sense of security. One can hardly reflect upon **Amos 5:21** without due deliberation upon the words of Isaiah (739 BC), approximately twenty years later, concerning the same mindset of God against the southern kingdom of Judah:

> Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. 14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (**Isaiah 1:13-14**)

As with Amos (760 BC), so, too, Isaiah (739 BC) gives God's reaction to their rituals, rituals of worship not expressive of emotions of the heart. Both Israel and Judah were lulled into thinking that their religious rituals were fulfilling their religious duties. As observed earlier in this essay, God commanded instruments of music (**2 Chronicles 29:25**) to be employed in the Temple to honor Him. God is not condemning the use of the instrument anymore than He is condemning their offerings. God's rejection of their rituals focused upon their external behavior—behavior that God deplored. They employed their music in a mechanical way as well as their other activities in order to please or appease the God of heaven, so they thought Their worship was not "from the soul." Their worship was "soulless" worship. The people of Israel practiced ritual over heart obedience. God wants worship from the soul/heart, not mere external ritual. The same is still true today. This is why one must sing and make music with all one's heart. What did God want from the Northern Kingdom? Listen to Amos as he reveals the words of God to this apostate nation:

> 12 For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. 13 Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. 14 Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. 5 Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (**5:12-15**)

Amos 6:5

Once more, Amos focuses upon the don't-care attitude (**Amos 6:1**). In this Scripture, he begins with the Southern Kingdom and then, immediately turns his attention to the Northern Kingdom and then back to the Southern Kingdom. Once again, Amos leads up to the use of instruments in their gatherings—their homes. **Amos 5:23** appears to be in a context of Temple worship, but **Amos 6:5** appears to be in a context of one's life outside the Temple. He deals with their sumptuous lifestyles—lives lived in total disregard for the poor. Listen to Amos as the Holy Spirit speaks through him:

> [3] You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. [4] You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. [5] You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. [6] You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. (**6:3-6**)

Just a casual reading of this text reveals the ghastly consequences of surface religion. In **5:18**, Amos pronounced a "woe" on the Northern Kingdom, now he pronounces a "woe" on the Southern Kingdom (**6:1**). In this pericope (**6:1-7**), Amos condemns their luxurious lifestyle—a lifestyle of self-indulgence and gluttony, which was supported by a reign of terror (**6:3**). This same life of self-indulgence also appeared in the Northern Kingdom. It is in this regard that God called attention to their extravagance at the expense of the common people: "I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the LORD" (**3:15**). How does this lifestyle coincide with the Southern Kingdom? One reads of their ivory-inlaid beds, drinking wine by the bowls, use of the finest lotions, no feelings for the poor, and no compassion or understanding of the impending judgment of the Northern Kingdom.

It is in this context that Amos mentions musical instruments. In **5:23**, one discovers that God is not pleased with their musical instruments since their worship was hypocritical—performed in order to impress the people with their acts of piety. Now Amos turns his attention to the imitation of musical instruments employed by David, instruments commanded by God. What is the difference between David and the Southern Kingdom leaders who also employed musical instruments? The answer lies in the attitude. In other words, David employed the instruments to God's glory, but, on the other hand, their instruments were used for frivolous songs. David made songs for God's glory, but they made songs to the glory of their feast. These individuals were not serving the Lord but their own appetites. The context of **6:5** is that the songs were "frivolous" in nature. They composed songs and played them on harps as David did. The one was frolicsome; on the other hand, the other was for God's glory. They had, so to speak, their jazz, their rock and roll, and their hard-rock music. There is a proper and an improper use of songs and instruments. One can hardly read Amos 6:1-5 without due reflection upon Paul's admonition to the Christians in Ephesus. Listen to Paul as he addresses the proper use of songs and instrumental music, not drunken songs sung with musical instruments:

> [18] Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. [19] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual

songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (**Ephesians 5:18-20**)

Worship: Relegated to Mere Spectators

This is the third argument under his new caption ("Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use"). His second contention surrounded **2 Chronicles 29:25**, which is dealt with earlier in this paper. His third quarrel with the use of the instrument is as weak as his other opinions developed in his short essay. He complains that if one allows one to play the instrument, then this moves the so-called worship service from the hands of the church into the hands of professionals.[70] He continues his arguments by writing: "Thus, the congregation's role as participants in the worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators."[71] This argument is extremely off base. If one were to apply this kind of rationale, then one would have to stop one person from preaching and another individual from leading in prayer, or another person from leading the singing; otherwise, according to Coffman, the "worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators.

This whole subject of worship needs a theological overhaul by the Christian community. The Churches of Christ need to rethink the traditional concept of worship. Believers must reanalyze the question: What Is Worship? It is true that in corporate worship, one is to be active, not passive. Having said this, one must also realize that participation is not always actually participating by outward visible performance. For example, one can attend a Christian assembly and participate without actually performing in the activity in a visible way. Is this a contradiction? No! For instance, one can participate by paying attention and involving himself or herself in the activity, which is passive participation. The only kind of singing mentioned in the New Testament in an actual assembly is found in First Corinthian 14. This singing is solo singing, not congregational singing. Even though only one person sings, nevertheless, there is still broad participation by all, even though passive in nature. The same is true when one or several play instruments; there is still broad participation, even though passive in nature.

This kind of participation also includes the way one responds to other activities that occur in the assembly. Even though a congregation usually has only one person to address the congregation, still the congregation involves itself through the way it thinks and receives the message. In the heart one plays a part in all the activities, even though one does not actively engage in the solo, preaching, prayers, and so on. When God reaches one's heart in sensitivity to the spirit-filled preaching and prayers, one still joins in the actions, even though listening is passive in nature. It is not correct to say the congregation has relegated its activities to the "spectator" status.

CONCLUSION

All the arguments against instrumental music by Coffman are based upon a so-called worship service, which is based on the philosophy of "pattern theology. If God has not ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, then his position about the sinfulness of instrumental music is null-and-void. " The issues presented by James

Burton Coffman[72] focuses on a so-called worship service on Sunday morning—usually about one hour. The current concept of worship is one of the great obstacles to unity among God's family today. Christians are divided over something that the New Testament never addresses. The Scriptures never legislate concerning certain rituals to be carried out in a so-called worship service—a service with five prescribed rituals that have to be executed in a precise manner.[73] The New Testament does not use a worship formula for the Christian assembly, or meeting. In 1977, Dwaine Dunning debated Rubel Shelly over the use of the instrument in the Christian assembly. In this debate, Dunning successfully argued that all Shelly's arguments were null-and-void since the New Testament never ordained a worship service for the Christian community.[74]

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[1] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 31.

[2] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20. In spite of the fact that I am dealing with his arguments, this essay is not written to impugn his integrity or his sonship to God. Even though we disagree over the instrument, I still regard Coffman as a sincere child of God—one that has eternal life in and through Jesus the Messiah.

[3] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[4] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 29.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid

[7] To illustrate this mindset, the late E. H. Miller (1909-1989), my uncle, wrote an essay, in 1945, entitled, "The Establishment of the Church," in which he enumerated the so-called five-acts of worship as the identifying marks of a true church. See "The Establishment of the Church," in Homer L. King, *Old Paths Advocate*, ed. Homer L. King (Lebanon, Missouri: Old Paths Advocate, 1945), 70, where Miller writes:

> We cannot escape seeing that in the above five items of worship, simplicity is an outstanding characteristic of the church established by our Lord, just as he has shown in all his teaching and examples in his own life and work.

[8] The above citation from the late E. H. Miller is also advanced among other Church of Christ folk other than just among the one-cup and nonSunday school movement. It is advanced by many Christians upon the presupposition that God

ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, one of which is to sing without the accompaniment of an instrument. It is in this vein that Curtis Cates, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, writes about the five-acts of worship. See Curtis Cates, *Worship: Heaven's Imperative, OR Man's Innovations* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publications, 1993), 21, where he writes: "Please be assured, dear reader, that there are five items of worship set forth clearly in the New Testament; there is a Divine pattern for worship. The early church engaged in those acts (Acts 2:42)." Then on pages 42-46, he discusses the mechanical instrumental music as a violation of one of the so-called five-acts of worship. This view of worship is still very entrenched into the thinking of God's people, even though one never reads of five-acts of worship in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers never tell Christians to gather for a worship service in order to perform five prescribed rituals, rituals that constitute a "Divine pattern for worship."

[9] Francis W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Introduction and Exegesis*, *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 10:714.

[10] Theodore O. Wedel, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Exposition*, *The Interpreter's Bible* 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 715.

[11] Ibid., 713, 714.

[12] See Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC"s Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991, 97.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' . . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation"; see also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

[15] See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72, 73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis , explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

[16] See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Rand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

[17] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's handbook, Revised Edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23.

[18] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[19] Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20.

[20] L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 28-29.

[21] See James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music, *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20-22. This saintly man was ninety years old as the time of this writing. Today he has just approached his 100th birthday.

[22] Johnson, *The Psychology of Interpretation*, 45.

[23] See Stanley fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172, for an excellent presentation of subjective and objective interpretation.

[24] Fish does not use "interpretative community" but "interpretive community."

[25] Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

> An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism make possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[26] Fish, *Is There A Text*, 335.

[27] See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] O. E. Payne, *Instrumental Music Is Scriptural* (Hanna, Alberta: Canada, 1920), 17.

[30] For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[31] See Johnson, *The Psychology of Interpretation*, 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and

human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[32] For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[33] Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[34] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20, 21.

[35] Ibid., 21

[36] Ibid., 20

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 21, where he says, "In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic versions."

[40] Ibid., 20.

[41] Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 21.

[43] Ibid., 20

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid. See also Dallas Burdette, "Congregational Worship and Division" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption SERMONS and then, under the subheading WORSHIP, for analysis of the underlying cause of division within the Stone/Campbell Movement—a movement that has divided into at least twenty-five or more warring factions.

[46] See Dallas Burdette, "True Worship" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrit.net [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption SERMONS and then, under the subheading WORSHIP. For an excellent analysis of rethinking the worship concept of five acts, see Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992.

[47] Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 21.

[48] Ibid., 22.

[49] Ibid., 20, 21.

[50] Ralph W. Harris, Executive Editor, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Sigma—Omega, Word Numbers 4375—5457*, vol., 16 (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 541.

[51] See Ibid., 542.

[52] The verb is first person, singular, future, active, indicative and means "to pull, twitch, twang, or play."

[53] Harris, *The new Testament Greek-English Dictionary,* 541.

[54] Ibid.

[55] See Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 394.

[56] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians, Commentary on the New Testament* (St. Paul Minnesota: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937; reprint Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998), 620 [page references are to reprint edition].

[57] Ibid.

[58] See James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950), where he translates Ephesians 5:19-20:

> Converse with one another in the music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life, praise the Lord heartily with words and music, and render thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ at all times and for all things.

[59] See Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 169, where he says,

> ᾿αλμοῖ (psalmois) may refer to OT psalms or songs, ὑμνοϊ (jj&umnois) to NT hymns about Christ or Christian canticles, and ωςδαῖ (wdais) to spontaneous hymnody—songs from Scripture, songs about Christ, and songs from the Spirit. Also, since ᾿αψλλω (psallw) originally meant "pluck a stringed instrument," ᾿αλμοψς (psalmos) could allude to musical accompaniment (cf. Moffatt, "with the music of psalms"; Turner, Words 353).

[60] For a more detailed study of the relevance of the Law to the believer, see Dallas Burdette's sermon: "Delight in the Law of the Lord: Psalm 1" [ON-LINE].

Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, and then under the subheading OLD TESTAMENT, then under PSALMS.

[61] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 20.

[62] Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 305.

[63] *Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979.

[64] See Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1295, where they comment on the word "psalm" and "making melody":

> **psalms**—generally accompanied by an instrument. . . . **Making melody**—Greek, "playing and singing with an instrument." **In your heart**—not merely with the tongue; but the serious feeling of the heart accompanying the singing of the lips (cf. I Cor. 14:15; Ps. 47:7).

See also Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians" in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot victor Publishing, 1983), where he comments on the meaning of the words "making melody":

> First is communication with **one another with psalms** (psalmois, OT psalms sung with stringed instruments such as harps), **hymns** (&umnois, praises composed by Christians), **and spiritual songs** (a general term). Second is communication with **the Lord** by *singing* and *making melody* (psallontes, singing with a stringed instrument) **in the heart**.

See also Alfred Martin, "Ephesians" in Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 1314, where he writes about the Greek participle translated as "making melody":

> **Psalms**. This word usually indicates songs set to instrumental accompaniment, as does also the participle translated **making music** (psallontes).

[65] This phrase will be examined in detail in Chapter 3 of this series. For now, I want to illustrate that this phrase has to do with one's wholehearted commitment to the Lord. Some sincere Christians cite this phrase, out of context, to justify condemnation of instrumental music.

[66] Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 21.

[67] Goebel Music, "The New Testament Commands Us to Use Old Testament Psalms," *The Spiritual Sword* 10, no. 1 (October 1978): 22-27.

[68] This kind of application is what I call Church of Christ hermeneutics. In other words, this brand of hermeneutics isolates Scriptures from its context and then builds

its theology upon the so-called book, chapter, and verse citation. This is same kind of interpretation that Satan exercised in his confrontation with Jesus when he cited from Psalm 91:11-12. Satan misapplied the intent of the author, thus Jesus had to correct his application with another Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16). This author, Dallas Burdette, also cited these two Scriptures in the early years of my ministry. I was not conscious that I, too, had misapplied these Scriptures.

[a] Traditionally *peace offerings*

[a] Deut. 6:5

[b] Lev. 19:18

[69] This phrase ("in the heart"), as rendered in the KJV, will be dealt with more exhaustively in Chapter 3 of this series.

[b] Or *tithes on the third day*

[70] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 22.

[71] Ibid.

[72] In concluding my remarks, I again want to stress that I believe that Coffman is a true believer in Jesus as the Savior of the world. He is God's child. When he passes from this life, he will enter the gates of eternity. Unfortunately, this paper is necessary to assist those who read Coffman's essay to understand more clearly the teaching of the Holy Spirit on this subject. His mistake is an honest mistake of the heart, not rebellion against God. Salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon one's acceptance of Jesus as Lord. All error is error but not all error will condemn one's soul, otherwise no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to salvation, otherwise no one could be saved. Am I in fellowship with Christians in error? Yes! What other kind are there?

[73] For a detailed study of worship, see Dallas Burdette's studies on worship, located under www.freedominchrist.net [ON-LIN] under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP [accessed 24 November 2005].

[74] Rubel Shelly and Dwaine Dunning, *Shelly—Dunning Debate* (William C. Johnson, Inc: West Monroe, Louisiana, 1977).

The Gospel is the One Faith in Ephesians 4:5

Thrust Statement: **The Gospel is the one faith in Ephesians 4:5.**

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:5

Prior to Paul's statement about the "one faith" (**Ephesians 4:5**), he soars into the height of heaven, as it were, in his contemplation of the "one faith." He begins this Epistle with an explanation of the spiritual blessings in Christ (**1:3-14**). This "one faith" is about God's predestinating those who have faith in Jesus to be "adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (**1:5**). Following this pericope (Spiritual Blessings in Christ—**1:13-14**), he, immediately, says, "I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints" (**1:15**). In this second pericope (Thanksgiving and Prayer—**1:15-23**), he prays that their eyes and understanding will be opened to the incomparable greatness of his power to those "who believe" (**1:18-19**).

In chapter two, Paul talks about their prior state of condemnation and their present state of redemption. This "one Faith" (**4:5**) is about God raising individuals up with Christ and seating them with Christ in the heavenlies" (**2:6**). Also, Paul expresses this "one faith" in glowing terms: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (**2:8**). This "one faith" is about those "who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Jesus" (**2:13**). Again, the "one faith" is found in the following words of Paul: "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (**2:18**).

If one is to understand clearly the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**, one must read the first three chapters in this short Epistle. For instance, chapter three discusses this "one faith" in terms of the "mystery of Christ" (**3:1-13**). This "one faith" is about Jesus. Paul says, "This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to every one the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:8-9**). God

accomplished this redemption for humanity "In him and through faith in him" (**3:13**). There is only one way to God—faith in Jesus.

Paul, after having developed the background of this "one faith," encourages all believers to put forth every effort to maintain the Spirit's unity—a unity created by the Holy Spirit (**4:1-3**). This pericope (Unity in the body of Christ—**4:1-16**) is reminiscent of **2:18** ("by one Spirit"). Since every believer is introduced into the "one body" by the Holy Spirit (see also **1 Corinthians 12:13**), every saint is reminded that there is just "one body," "one Spirit," "one hope," "one Lord," "one faith," "one baptism," and "one God and Father of all" (**4:4-6**). This "one faith" is faith in Jesus as God's Anointed One for the salvation of the world (see also **John 3:16-21**). Jesus is the object of the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**.

The "How" and the "Why" of God's Salvation

Thrust Statement: **Both men and women are to give testimony to the Mystery of God's administration of grace.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:9-14**

In this section of Scripture (**Ephesians 1:9-14**), Paul sets forth the "how" and the "why" of Salvation for God's people. In other words, Paul unfolds the mystery of *how* individuals become God's people as well as the *why* of salvation in the lives of God's children. If one wishes to appreciate God's salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus, one should answer the following two questions: (1) how did we become God's children? And (2) why did we become God's children? This essay seeks to answer these two questions. Paul reveals the *how* whereby sinful humanity can become a part of His new community. The new community is God's possession, that is to say, His heritage. Not only must one be concerned with the *how* but also of the *why* of salvation

Mystery of His Will

Before one embarks upon the *how* and the *why* of salvation, one should briefly reread **1:9** concerning the "mystery of His will" in which He will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (**1:10**). In essence, one can say that the "mystery of His will" is that the Gospel (justification through faith in His Son) is available to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In Jesus, God revealed that His love, His concern, His grace, and His mercy were for all humanity, not just Jews. Prior to the coming of Jesus, humanity lived in a divided world. A part of the "mystery of His will" centered on demolishing the wall of hostility that separated Jew from Gentile. Jesus came into the world to wipe out division between the Jew and the Gentile (**2:11-22**) through His own body upon the Tree (**2:16**).

The prepositional phrase "in Christ" captures the very core of unity. "In Christ" occurs eighty-six times in the Pauline epistles. Paul, fourteen times in the **Book of Ephesians**, uses this phrase to capture the foundation of this phenomenon of unity created by God.[1] This phrase is a dynamic unity of celestial (heavenly) and terrestrial (earthly) dimensions. Paul expresses this truth with great clarity:

> And he [b] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**Ephesians 1:9-10**). [2]

If one understands the "how" and "why" of salvation, this awareness should assist one in seeking to bring about unity within the Christian community, a community that is shattered into many sectarian camps. A consciousness of the *how* of salvation puts everyone on equal footing—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. The heart of this unity is that there is "one body" (**2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 4:25**). Since there is only "one body," one can say that this truth ("one body") is the means whereby Christ brings unity to all the warring factions (various divisions) within the Christian community; this "one body" brings unity to all the various races (every nation); this "one body" also establishes equality between men and women. Paul grabs hold of these various issues as he seeks unity among the hostile forces at work to disrupt the plan of God for the salvation of all peoples. Listen to Paul as he writes to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:28**).

A proper concept of the phrase "in Christ" should bring about harmony among God's people. Christians are alienated into countless argumentative cliques over dogma; many Christians are not speaking to one another over the race issue—blacks and whites; Christians are at odds over the role of women in the Christian community. Christians are on bad terms over the proper procedure concerning the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Since the Jew and Gentile as well as the slave and free are no longer problems for the church, perhaps, a few comments are in order to set the stage for the dismantling of another long-held tradition concerning the role of women in ministry and the dismantling of other long-held traditions about each distinctive group within the Churches of Christ as embodying the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Many Christians still fight like cats-and-dogs over the least infraction of their cherished beliefs, which destroys the unity of the "one body" for which our Lord prayed (**John 17**).

As one reflects upon the *how* of salvation (a salvation provided by God), one is immediately confronted with the role that women play within the Christian community created by God. Is she or is she not to preach the Gospel? Can she give testimony to the world concerning the coming of Jesus into the world as Savior? Can she give her testimony about salvation in the assembly? Can she teach in the presence of men? These are questions that this study will briefly address. Since this study is about the *how* and *why* of salvation, it is appropriate to discuss who can proclaim the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (**Romans 1:17**)—the *how* of salvation. Is the Great Commission limited to the Eleven in Mark, Luke, and John? Or does the Great

Commission include all the disciples of Jesus—both men and women? Part one of this study will focus upon the role of women in the Great Commission and the unfortunate divisions that separate God's people from one another. It appears, so it seems to me, that if God's children understood the greatness and richness of what He has accomplished for humanity in and through Jesus, one would work harder to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. If one properly appreciates the *how* and *why* of salvation, this perception should assist us in working together to bring about harmony among all God's people. The *how* and *why* of salvation will be analyzed in part two of this study.

The Role of Women and Church Division

One of the most controversial issues within the Christian community is the proper role of women within the Christian gatherings—to speak or not to speak in the assembly. Many Christians still cite **1 Timothy 2:9-15** and **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** without consulting the context of these two famous passages.[3] The traditional view contradicts other clear passages. Since the Word of God does not contradict itself, then one must seek to understand the two controversial texts, as cited above, in light of their context. Whatever these passages are teaching, one knows that the traditional interpretation is not correct. The Kroegers correctly point out: "It is necessary to compare Scripture with Scripture to find the current meaning. We must consider *all* that the Bible has to say about the activities of women committed to God's will."[4] Many cite these two pericopes without reference to the context.[5] The role of women in the church has driven a wedge into the body of Christ. Do Christians have a right to keep alive the denunciation of women in ministry in the same way that the church employed the Scriptures to justify slavery in the nineteenth century?

In the first century church, Christians maintained diversified viewpoints. Yet, their differences were not to divide the body of Christ. Whether one employs the expression *churches of* Christ (**Romans 16:16**) or the expression *churches of the* Gentiles (**16:4**), as found in **Romans 16**, still there is just "one body" (**Ephesians 4:4**).[6] There was not "one body" for the meat eaters and "another body" for the non-meat eaters (**Romans 14:1-4**).[7] There was not "one body" for the Sabbath keepers and "another body" for the non-Sabbath keepers (**14:5-8**). There was not "one body" for the blacks and "another body" for the whites (**Revelation 7:9-10**). There was not "one body" for the Jews and "another body" for the Gentiles (**Ephesians 2:14-18**). There was not "one body" for the males and "another body" for the females (**Galatians 3:26-29**). The prophet Joel (835 BC) wrote about the Messianic Age in which he stated that God's Spirit would be poured out on "all people," which includes females as well as males:

> I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (**Joel 2:28-29**).

"Both men and women" were active in the ministry of Jesus as well as in the ministry of the apostles. In spite of what Joel wrote, still many churches will not allow women to speak in their assemblies or pray in their assemblies or request songs in their

assemblies. In fact, some Christians will not allow women to give thanks for food in the presence of men, even in the home. Also, some advance the notion that women should not conduct private Bible studies on the off chance a man might drop in. Recently, I read two essays in which the writers (both males) took the position that women could not write about Christianity and place their essays on the Internet.[8] Why? According to these two preachers, the writer (female) of the essay would violate **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**.[9] Yet, in **chapter eleven of First Corinthians**, Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying in the assembly (**11:5**). Whatever **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** is saying, it cannot contradict **1 Corinthians 11:5**.[10] Luke begins his **Book of Acts** with the apostles as well as the women praying together, along with the brothers of Jesus. Luke writes:

> 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives,
> a Sabbath day's walk [a] from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went
> upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter,
> John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew;
> James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of
> James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the
> women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (**Acts 1:12-14**).

Yes, even in the presence of the apostles and the brothers of Jesus, one discovers that the women—even the mother of Jesus—were praying. Also, Luke records that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (**21:9**). Where did they prophesy? Did they prophecy out in the cornfield to a bunch of corn stalks? Or did they prophesy to both men and women? Earlier, in his history of the Christian movement, Luke mentions the wife (Priscilla) of Aquila who participated in teaching Apollos "the way of God more adequately (**28:26**).[11] Priscilla is also listed in the "hall of fame" in **Romans 16** (**verse 3**)—eleven women are named in this chapter. Of the four names associated with the church of Philippi, three were women—Euodia and Syntyche (**Philippians 4:2-3**) and Lydia (**Acts 16:11-15**) and one a man (Clement—**Philippians 4:3**). Euodia and Syntyche contended (labored) with Paul at his side "in the Gospel" (**4:3**). Even at Thyatira (one of the seven churches of Asia Minor), the church had a woman teaching (**Revelation 2:18-29**). Listen to what Jesus said about this woman who calls herself a prophetess:

> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who
> calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into
> sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given
> her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast
> her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with
> her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her
> children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches
> hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your
> deeds. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to
> her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not
> impose any other burden on you) (**2:20-24**).

God did not condemn her (Jezebel) for teaching, but rather, He condemned her for what she was teaching—"sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (**2:20**). Jezebel was teaching Gnostic philosophy. She had in essence become a Gnostic leader. Once more, God gave "her time to repent of her immorality, but she was unwilling." If it had been wrong for her to teach, one wonders why God did not say something about that. This testimony is also inferred evidence that women did take a public role in the preaching and teaching of God's Word, otherwise she would not have been accepted as a public figure within the Christian community.

In the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church, there was no distinction of sex. **Acts 2:1-4** seems to include the women mentioned in **Acts 1:12-14**. If so, this accounts for Peter's citation of **Joel 2** in order to give validity to the unusual circumstances on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:14-21**). The women disciples of Jesus had prepared the way for what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The right and duty of women to co-operate with men in carrying out the Great Commission cannot be questioned. All Christians are ministers of God. All believers, according to Paul, are ministers of reconciliation (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:2**). If the traditional view concerning women is correct, one wonders why God would disenfranchise approximately three fourth, or at least one half, of His disciples from proclaiming the Good News about God's Way of salvation "in" and "through" Jesus. Since all Christians are to rejoice in the *how* of salvation, it is appropriate to briefly discuss those who have been disenfranchised from telling the *how* of salvation in any public manner, especially to men. This brief detour of the *how* and *why* of salvation focuses on an examination of **Luke 24** to illustrate that the women were told to be witnesses as well as the men concerning the *how* of salvation.

Women Included in the Great Commission

Luke 24

Acts 1 and **2** are a continuation of **Luke 24**. If one wishes to understand **chapters one** and **two** of **Acts**, one needs to reread carefully **Luke 24**. Just a casual reading reveals that the women were included in the "you are witnesses of these things" (**24:48**). On the morning of the resurrection, Luke informs Theophilus (see **Acts 1:1**) that the "women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb (**Luke 24:1**). Upon their arrival, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away (**24:2**). While wondering about this event, Luke says, "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground" (**24:5**). Two men stood by these women in clothing that "gleamed like lightning" (**24:4**). These two individuals reminded these women that Jesus had foretold this event about the resurrection to them while He was in Galilee (**24:6-8**).

Luke gives the names of some of these women, but not all: "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles" (**24:10**). After talking with the two men, they returned to the city to tell the "Eleven" and "all the others" (**24:9**) that Jesus was raised. Luke reports to Theophilus that after the women met with the apostles, and the others, that on the same day, two of those present left and headed for a "village called Emmaus," about seven miles from Jerusalem (**24:13**). Luke informs Theophilus that Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men as they were discussing the events that had just transpired in

Jerusalem about the crucifixion (**24:13-32**). During the course of the conversation, these two disciples related to the stranger (Jesus) what had been reported to them by the women who had gone earlier to the tomb (**24:22-24**).

Following this encounter with Jesus, Luke reports: "They got up and returned once more to Jerusalem. For a second time, one observes the gathering of possibly the one hundred and twenty mentioned in **Acts 1**.There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together" (**24:33**), which included the women. Yet again, Jesus appears in their presence (**24:36**) as he had previously appeared before the women at the resurrection and the two men with whom Jesus had talked with on the way to Emmaus. Just as Jesus had earlier unfolded the Scriptures to these men, Jesus again, unfolds the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning His sufferings and death and resurrection (**24:45-47**). After this revelation of the Messianic prophecies concerning Himself, He says to the Eleven and to the others, "You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**24:48-49**).

This promise—outpouring of the Holy Spirit—is generally limited to the Twelve on the Day of Pentecost. But this promise was to be poured out on both men and women, not just the apostles. According to Joel, the promise of the Father was to be poured out on both men and women. Luke corroborates the fulfillment of Joel's Messianic prophecy (**Acts 2**). Individuals who wish to reach certain doctrinal conclusions by assimilating their presuppositions and their attitudes toward women sterilize this truth—both men and women were present and were to receive the Holy Spirit (**Joel 2**). Proper biblical hermeneutics demand that every interpreter look at the context. One's failure to appreciate the context will lead one to give undue acquiescence to an excessively biased point of view. According to the context of **Luke 24**, the women were also present among those in attendance with the Eleven. The context of **Luke 24** reveals that the women, along with the men, were to be "witnesses of these things" and "clothed with power upon high" (**24:48-49**). The Great Commission was not/is not limited to the male species.

One Hundred and Twenty: Men and Women

Acts One

One should read the **first two chapters of Acts** in conjunction with the **last chapter of Luke** in order to follow the continuity of Luke's comments in **Acts 1** and **2**. **Luke 24** concludes his Gospel with two outstanding statements—(1) "witness of these things" and (2) "clothed with power upon high." Just a casual reading of the Gospel accounts reveals a revolutionary doctrine of liberation for women—a liberation from degradation and inferiority. As stated above, in **Acts 1**, Luke records the presence of the Eleven in an upper room, along with "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus," which also included the brothers of Jesus (**1:12-14**). This number totaled one hundred and twenty (**1:15**). The significant fact is, as stated above, that the women prayed alongside of the apostles and the others: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (**1:14**). This Scripture runs contrary to the practice of many Christians today. Not only did the women pray in this gathering of the one hundred and twenty, but they also took part in

casting lots in the choosing of Mathias (**1:22-26**). There is no indication, from the context, that this selection process (casting lots) was limited only to the men.

Yet again, some repetition is necessary for one to follow the logical sequence of events in order to show conclusively that the women were present in the events that transpired following the resurrection of Jesus (**Luke 24:36-49**). Hopefully, repetition may be pardoned here, for the minds of many Christians are so leavened by the traditions of the church Fathers that vital truths are difficult to see. Since truth is so often the projection of the particular views of the powerful, it is necessary to go back to the Scriptures and reread with freshness. In other words, the traditions of the church make it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible afresh.

Once more, one cannot read this unit of Scripture (**23:47-49**) without a consciousness of two things: (1) the witnesses included women, and (2) the women who followed Jesus from Galilee were witnesses. Pay attention to Luke, as cited above, as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (**23:55**). The phrase "from Galilee" flashes like neon lights along side the mention of "women." Why? Were they to witness concerning Jesus? As Luke continues his scenario, he sets forth the prominence of the women's role following the resurrection. Remember, following the burial of Jesus, the women took spices to the tomb (**24:1**). They found the stone rolled away and entered the tomb (**24:2**). Whereupon, they were frightened, and Luke says, "the women bowed down" (**24:5**). The two men questioned them about why they were looking for the living among the dead (**24:5**). Again, one observes the use of the word *Galilee* in the course of the conversation by the two men: "He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee" (**24:6**). It was not just the apostles that Jesus told about His impending death while in Galilee—women were included. The expressions *from Galilee* and *in Galilee* are important in trying to ascertain whether or not women were included in the command to witness to others about the *how* of salvation.

Can one in his or her wildest imagination edit out the women from "those with them"? The women play a major role in this section of Scripture (see also **Acts 1:12-15**). Jesus appears to His disciples. Should one limit the word *disciple* only to the male species? Surely not! There is no evidence to uphold that the word *disciple* refers only to males. Suddenly Jesus stood among them (both men and women). Still there was unbelief on the part of the disciples. He told them to look at His hands and His feet in order to prove that He was not a ghost, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones (**24:37-41**). After that, He opened their minds so they could understand what the prophets had earlier spoken of (**24:47**). He then informed those present (both men and women) that they were to be "witnesses of all these things" (**24:48**). At that time, Jesus let them know that He would send the promise of His Father upon each of them (**24:40**). But they were instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with this power from on high (**24:49**). Did the Eleven and the other disciples, which included women, understand that they were all to wait in Jerusalem for this outpouring of God's Spirit upon both men and women? Yes! As stated above, the **first chapter of Acts** reveals that there were one hundred and twenty who were gathered in Jerusalem waiting for the events to transpire (**Acts 1:15**).

Once more, if the women were not included, one wonders why Peter did not say so. In fact, he cited the prophet Joel to show that Joel had previously foretold the phenomenon that they were now witnessing:

> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. [15] These men (ου/τοι Joutoi) are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16] No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "[17] 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, **both** men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'[a] " (**Joel 2:14-21**).

In **Acts 2:1**, Luke writes: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." On the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit is generally limited to the Twelve among many interpreters of the Word, but, according to Peter, the outpouring of the Spirit was upon the one hundred and twenty:

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them (**Acts 2:1-4**).

Women Who Followed Jesus From Galilee

Acts 13:31

In just a casual reading of **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**, one does not, under normal circumstances, catch a glimpse of the importance of this phrase in analyzing the role of women in the proclamation of God's Good News. The phrase "from Galilee" plays a significant role in one's interpretation of the role of women in Christian ministry. For example, an angel of God uses this phrase "in Galilee" in calling attention to their (the women) travels with Jesus (**Luke 24:6**). Another example is found in the Book of Mark. As Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth, Mark gives an insightful note concerning the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. Luke specifically mentions three women at the crucifixion by name, but he does not stop there. He also says that in addition to these three there were "many other women." What is significant about all of this is what Mark says about where these women came from:

> Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. [41] In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there (**Mark 15:40-41**).

Once more, the geographical name "Galilee" plays a major role in understanding the role of women in Christian ministry. Matthew, too, gives information about these women who came from Galilee:

> Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. [56] Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons (**Matthew 27:55-56**).

Again, this information about women following Jesus from Galilee is extremely important. Not only did Mark and Matthew call attention to this devotion among the women, but Luke also details this same information. Listen to Luke as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (**Luke 23:55**). In the reading of **Mark** and **Matthew**, one name stands out in BOLD—Mary Magdalene. Following Luke's statement about the women from Galilee, he then proceeds to list the names of some of these women:

> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. [10] It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. [11] But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense (**24:9-11**).

This information from **Mark**, **Matthew**, and **Luke**, along with the full context, leads one to realize that the Great Commission was not given only to the Eleven, but to all those present—both men and women. If one wishes to understand the ones to whom this commission was given, one must read and reread the entire context for contextual understanding. An understanding of the full text sheds light on the role women were/are to play in the proclamation of God's Good News to a lost and dying world. The women who discovered the empty tomb returned to tell the apostles what had transpired (**Luke 24:9**). Yet, the apostle refused to believe, as Luke says, "nonsense" (**24:11**).

Once more, repetition is necessary in order to drive home the point that women did share in ministry in the early church and to keep continuity in the analysis of **Luke 24** with reference to the women's presence with the apostles and others. On this same day, Luke records two of His disciples on the road going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (**24:13**).[12] On this road, Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men and struck up a conversation. In the course of the conversation, these men related what the women had said about the empty tomb and that Jesus was alive (**24:22-24**). It was then that Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith (**24:25**). Jesus

then explained to them what the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms had said about Him (**24:27**).

After Jesus went to their home and broke bread and gave to them, Luke says that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus (**24:30-31**). As one seeks to unravel the part that the women played in this part of God's announcement of the resurrected Christ, one should always be conscious that this background is necessary in order to follow the logical sequence of what is about to follow. Following this episode with Jesus, Luke writes: "They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together" (**24:33**). They found not only "the Eleven," but also "those with them." These two men related their stories, and while they were speaking, the Lord Jesus "stood among them" (**24:36**). He showed them his hands and His feet (**24:39**). A conversation erupted between Jesus and His disciples; it was at this point that Luke writes:

> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**24:45-49**).

Both men and women were present! Jesus informed His disciples—both men and women—that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all nations. Jesus did not limit this commission just to the male species, but rather he issued this statement to all the disciples present—"You are witnesses" (**24:33**). Also, in **verse 48**, Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things." All the disciples—both men and women—were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise from on high. Luke gives the fulfillment of this "promise from on high" in **Acts 2**.

While they were assembled, the one hundred and twenty cast lots for the selection of one to take the place of Judas (**1:23-26**). Luke writes: "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. The very next verse reads: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place" (**2:1**). On this occasion Luke reports:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them (**2:2-4**).

As stated above, sometimes repetition is necessary in order to uproot long-held traditions. There are three laws of learning that everyone should commit to memory: REPETITION, REPETITION, and REPETITION. If this event did not occur upon both men and women (one hundred and twenty), one still wonders why Peter cited the prophecy of Joel (**Joel 2:28-32**; **Acts 2:14-21**) about "your sons and daughters will

prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women" (**2:17**, **18**). If the women were totally silent on the Day of Pentecost, why did Peter cite this prophecy about women? Daughters and women stand out in this prophecy. Why did he stress "both men and women"? One's awareness of this prophecy calls to mind the words of Paul as he preached Jesus in Pisidian Antioch (**Acts 13:13-52**). What is remarkable about this pericope is found in his discourse about the witnesses (**13:31**). After relating to his hearers about Jesus' crucifixion and entombment and resurrection, Paul says: "And for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people" (**13:31**).

According to Paul, whoever traveled with Jesus from Galilee are "now" witnesses of these events. Did women travel with Jesus "from Galilee"? As noted above, Mark, as he concludes his Gospel, calls attention to many women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (**Mark 15:40-41**); Matthew also beckons notice to several women who traveled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (**Matthew 27-55-56**); Luke, too, summons awareness to women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (**Luke 23:55**). Earlier, Luke records the number of several women by name who traveled with Jesus "from one town and village to another" (**8:1-3**).

Did Paul exclude the women as witnesses in **Acts 13:31**? If so, there is nothing in the context to indicate that God disenfranchised the women from witnessing concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Were the women witnesses of the resurrection? Did Jesus refer to women as witnesses when the disciples were gathered together after the resurrection (see **Luke 24**)? Did Jesus promise His Spirit upon both men and women in the Great commission (see **Luke 24**)? Again, two things stand out **in Acts 13:31**—"Those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem" and "They are now witnesses to our people." Earlier, Luke, in the conclusion of his Gospel, speaks of the women as witnesses of the crucifixion and their having followed Jesus from Galilee:

> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." [48] When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. [49] But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things (**Luke 23:47-49**).

Church Divided into Various Warring Factions

It is not only the role of women in the Christian community that has estranged God's people, but Christians are at odds over a multitude of issues—Church treasury, instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, women cutting their hair, women wearing veils, worship service—five prescribed rituals, how to share the bread in the Lord's Supper—break or pinch the bread, and on and on it goes. The Baptist fellowship, too, is divided into numerous distinctive denominations.[13] Division is not just a phenomenon among those associated with the Stone/Campbell Movement. Unfortunately, division is the hallmark of God's church today. For example, within the Stone/Campbell Movement, one discovers that the original movement is into numerous factions, each claiming to be the one true church.

Churches have established barriers to segregate groups and individuals from one another within Christ's church.

God's people should seek to reestablish solidarity between the various factions that exist among His people, which includes Churches of Christ, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and so on. Why? There is only "one body." God's people must react against the smug, withdrawn, and loveless attitudes manifested by so many who profess faith in Christ. There is only one church and that church consists of everyone who puts his or her trust in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Just a casual look at the various journals within the Christian community reveals the sordid mess that many sincere Christians advance, all in the name of Jesus. Christians are divided over the so-called issues, not Jesus. Many Christians are preaching another Gospel than the Gospel of God—God's Way of salvation, namely, Jesus. The concept of the "one body" will be developed more fully in **Ephesians 4:4**.

It is my prayer that God's people will continue to uphold the belief that the very existence and character of Christianity is a society of men and women redeemed by the blood of Jesus. The Church is simply a company of believers who endeavor to learn and practice the will of God in their lives. If Christians wish to recapture the unity for which Jesus prayed, one must take seriously the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ, not some splinter faction of the Body. There should be one essential ministry of believers, that is, the perpetual ministry of the risen Lord. Sadly, the Church today is divided over something that God never commanded—assemble to perform a worship service with five rituals to be performed in a prescribed manner. It is foolish to look for any hard-and-fast system of rituals in the New Testament for a so-called worship service. There is an absence of rigid conformity of worship in the New Testament writings. The business of ministry is the business of the whole community, not just the paid preachers.

The church is important in the lives of God's people. One can say, at least to some extent, that the life of the Chuch is the continuation of the Messianic ministry that the apostles and others were continuously engaged in. The Church of Jesus is the organism that Jesus uses to carry out His purposes in the world. All of the early disciples—both men and women—were to engage in the proclamation of God's Way of salvation. Christians engaged in the Messianic ministry must help the helpless, release the captives, and seek and save the lost through telling them about Christ. Today, the Church is the New Israel—the people of God's New Covenant. Many Christians are seeking to revert back to a Judaistic type of worship with its ceremonial laws through their concept of worship in a geographical location with its five ritualistic acts, which, in some sense, is parallel to Judaism. Every congregation of Christ has an obligation to care for and desire to be in fellowship with other congregations. For the Christian, there is one essential ministry—His.

Without a proper definition of the Church, it is impossible to define adequately the work of ministry. The Church is not the kingdom of God. The Church makes known the kingdom of God, that is to say, His rule. The Church is never an individual in isolation from other believers, but rather, the church is one in community. One can define the term Church with a term such as "community." Whenever one defines the Church as an organization, then the organization and rites fracture the community into warring factions, each claiming to be the true Church. The εςκκλησιψα (ekklhsia) is

not an institution. One cannot abstract community from institution, nor can one abstract institution from community. There is a distinction between the Church being organized and the Church becoming an institution.

The localized church implies the universal church and the universal church implies the local church. Without the church becoming concrete, the church does not exist. There is one church, but this one church meets behind various labels that it has inherited from its forefathers. Many Christians, unknowingly, have substituted Christianity for theology, that is to say, its own brand of orthodoxy. In other words, the church, as a whole, has substituted the love of Jesus, the love of God, and life in the community of all God's children for its own brand of orthodoxy. The church must sacrifice life in its own denomination for its life in Jesus.

Without a clear understanding of the nature of the church, there can never be any effective solution to the problems that presently divide Christians. The church, to a large extent, has degenerated into building religious cults—cloning. Worship trends in many congregations simply become habitual repetition of rites. The church today needs to reevaluate its concept of worship. The present concept of worship is divisive. Each congregation seeks to indoctrinate its members in the traditions of the forefathers. Many churches have developed and maintained a one-sided interest in their denomination.[14] The essence of the church is found in its oneness of communion with Christ by faith and fellowship with others in love. The church is rooted in communion with God through Jesus Christ and communion with others. The whole life of every believer is a worship of God. For the Christian, one understands that his or her life is one continuous act of worship—twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday morning between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.

When Christians assemble on the Lord's Day, this common assembly is for the purpose of hearing the Word of God, for prayer, for fellowship, and for the purpose of sharing a meal in order to reflect upon Christ's redemption. These are the means whereby the church is ever conscious that they represent the ekklhsia. This awareness reinforces the idea that the ekklhsia is one with Christ and, at the same time, joined together through Him to others. The early assemblies were never considered a worship service, but, in its strictest and literal sense, a place for building up one another in the faith. The Lord's Supper is never spoken of in the New Testament as an act of worship, but it is simply the revelation of His righteousness, His love, and His justifying grace through the Branch—Jesus the Messiah.

The Body of Christ that Paul speaks of in the **Book of Ephesians** is essentially a fellowship of persons, not an institution. The Body of Christ cannot be an institution, or denomination, but a community of those who wait for the return of Jesus and live by faith in the Son of God and in love with all of God's children. Unfortunately, many people today do not see the need of meeting with other Christians. Even though the call is made to individuals, nevertheless, the followers assume a collective identity with the people of God. The church remains God's instrument upon earth for the proclamation of God's Good News of salvation "in" and "through" Christ. Thus, there is "one body," not many bodies. This brings us to the *how* of salvation. Everyone becomes part of this "one body" through faith in Jesus Christ. Part two of this study discusses in

detail the *how* and *why* of salvation. Hopefully, this next section will awaken in each person a desire to serve Him with all of one's soul, heart, and mind.

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[1] Ephesians 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32

[2] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[3] For a thorough investigation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, see Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); also see Sharon Hodgin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and The Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of The Religious and Cultural Milieu of The First Century* (New York: University Press of America, 1991).

[4] Ibid., 13.

[5] Since this essay is not designed to analyze the role of women in the church, this paper will only call attention to the more positive elements that many Christians overlook. In a forthcoming essay, I will do an analysis of **1 Timothy 2:9-15** and **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** in order to assist Christians in a proper understanding of these two most controversial texts.

[6] The expression *churches of Christ* is no more the name of the church than the expression *churches of the Gentiles.*

[7] Even though some of the Christians were right and others were wrong, still this misunderstanding was not sufficient to disrupt the unity of the body of Christ.

[8] Greg Gay, "The Internet – 4," *Old Paths Advocate* 74, no. 1 (January 2000): 3-5. Greg writes:

> *Is a woman posting a message on a web page publicly speaking?* The posting of messages on a site for the purpose of discussing the meaning of scriptures (sic) results in the blurring of men and women's roles in teaching. Each media must be carefully examined so we do not violate Biblical principles. A woman posting an opinion about a passage of scripture (sic) on a web site that any and all can access appears to be doing public speaking to me" (pp. 4, 5).

[9] See also Alan Bonifay, WWW.Parents/Leaders Beware, *Old Paths Advocate* 74, no 4 (April 2000): 3-5, where he warns about private Bible studies and women posting essays on the Internet. He writes:

> Just how many people that might entail is open to some discussion but it is certainly less than fifty – in fact, it is probably considerably less than twenty. What that means is that when wives and daughters contribute comments to a web page forum potentially open to hundreds, if not thousands, of contributors from all over the world they are violating 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (p. 4).

[10] Look for a forthcoming essay in which I will deal with **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** in context as well as **1 Timothy 2:9-15**. The traditional interpretations of these two Scripture citations contradict clear passages that allow women to participate in Christian ministry, even in the assembly. It appears, so it seems to me, that **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** relates to what the Judaizers were saying, not Paul. I could not find one statement in the Old Testament where women were told to keep silent or could not take a position of leadership. The "law" relates to the traditions of the Jews, not to the Old Testament Scriptures. Also, one must interpret **1 Timothy** in its context along with **2 Timothy** and **Titus** if one expects to understand what Paul had reference to.

> a That is, about 3 | 4 mile (about 1,100 meters)

[11] Priscilla is mentioned, along with her husband, seven times in the New Testament (**Acts 18:2, 18, 19, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19).** Out of the seven listings, Priscilla's name occurs first in five of the seven listings.

> a Joel 2:28-32

> a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

[12] Some repetition is necessary in order to keep continuity in the development of the role women played in the proclamation of the Good News.

> a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

[13] Frank S. Mead, Revised by Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Tenth Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 49-81.

[14] For an excellent discussion on the church and its ministry, I recommend the following books: T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948); and H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

The "How" and the "Why" of God's Salvation

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the *how* and *why* of Salvation.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:9-14**

The "How" of Salvation

Since the primary spotlight of this message is on redemption as found in **Ephesians 1:9-14**, it is necessary to return to the central focus of this message—the "how" and "why" of salvation. Whenever one really and truly understands the *how* and the *why* of salvation, this perception should go a long way in helping to eliminate so much dissension and confusion among the disciples of Jesus. As one contemplates upon the "how" of salvation, the words of Paul to the Ephesians captures the very center of salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9a**). One observes the Father electing (**1:4-6**), the Son redeeming (**1:7-12**), and the Holy Spirit sealing (**1:13-14**). God is the source, or originator, of our salvation. Paul, in his second Corinthian correspondence writes:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (**2 Corinthians 5:17-19**).

God, in His infinite love and justice, provided a way of salvation for everyone who wishes eternal life. God makes this salvation available through faith in His Son, not works. In the long sentence of Ephesians (**1:3-14**), Paul spells out God's part in redemption. In **verse 3**, Paul says that it is God who "has blessed us." But Paul does

not stop with that verb; he goes on to say that He "chose us" (**1:4**). Again, Paul drives home God's initiative "he predestined us" (**1:5**). Once more, as Paul reflects upon this salvation, he soars, as it were, into the heavens as he seeks to grasp the wonder of it all by saying: "to the praise of his glorious grace" (**1:6**), and, then, Paul, so it seems, is on a roll as he calls forth another verb as he grapples with the richness of God's grace. He "lavished on us" His grace (**1:8**). Yes, God did all this through Jesus (**1:9-11**). No wonder Paul says, "it is all from God" (**2 Corinthians 5:18**). God provides the *how* of salvation "in and through Christ." Paul employs the phrase "in Christ" nine times in this **Second Epistle to Corinth**.[1]

Paul, too, in his **First Epistle to the Corinthians**, calls attention to the origin or source of one's salvation, namely, God. He writes with clarity and forcefulness in revealing this source:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

Once more, Paul zeros in on the origin and place of salvation. It is because of God that individuals experience salvation. Paul again calls awareness to the *place* of this salvation—"in Christ." In this **First Epistle of Corinthians**, Paul employs the phrase "in Christ," thirteen times.[2] Since every believer is "in Christ," then he or she has every spiritual blessing that one needs to inherit eternal life. Paul calls notice to the "wisdom from God" in accomplishing redemption for the down-and-out. How did God accomplish such a feat for sinful humanity? How could God be just and, at the same time, justify sinners? God's answer is Jesus. In other words, Paul declares that God made Jesus "our righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (**1:30**). Since Jesus is our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption, then individuals can stand before a holy God because the Law of God is fulfilled in us through Jesus (**Romans 8:3-4**).

This righteousness that Paul addresses in **1 Corinthians 1:30** is a righteousness from God, not man. It is Jesus Christ Himself. God provides this righteousness; this righteousness is outside of men and women; this righteousness is more than *personal* holiness or even correct teaching. It is a righteousness that is *imputed* (λογιψζομαι, logizomai, "credited") to humanity through faith in Christ. Paul writes to the Romans:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:16-17**).

This "righteousness from God" stands out like a neon light flashing upon a billboard. This unique expression is descriptive; it tells where the righteousness comes from. Faith, in essence, is the channel through which God imputes to the believer His righteousness. The only way one can receive this righteousness from God is through faith in His Son Jesus. In fact, Paul stresses that this righteousness that belongs to Him is imputed to individuals through faith. According to Paul, it begins with faith and ends

with faith (**Romans 1:17**). When one puts his or her faith in Christ, then Jesus becomes his or her righteousness, holiness, and redemption. The righteousness that Paul tells about in **1 Corinthians 1:30** and **Romans 1:17** is a righteousness done for us, not in us. It is a righteousness that is vicarious. This righteousness is the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus upon the Tree. Again, Paul uses the phrase "righteousness from God" two other times in the **Book of Romans**:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**3:21-24**).

Even though this exact expression only crops up three times in the **Book of Romans**, nevertheless, one still finds the same concept presented in similar language. For instance, in **Romans 10:1-4**, Paul writes:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This righteousness of God comes through faith, not works. In the **fourth chapter of Romans**, Paul states that God's righteousness is "imputed" ("credited") to one through faith. Many do not like the word *impute*, but Paul utilizes this word thirty-four out of the forty-one times it is employed in the New Testament. In **Romans 4**, Paul utilizes this word (λογιψζομαι logizomai) eleven times. If one has a problem with this word *impute*, it is not with Dallas Burdette that one has a problem but with Paul. He is the one who wrote Romans under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Prior to **Romans 4**, Paul sets forth the *how* of salvation. In **Romans 3:25-26**, Paul discloses that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for sins committed. The words "sacrifice of atonement" are rendered in the KJV as "propitiation." This "sacrifice of atonement" is the "wisdom from God" in **1 Corinthians 1:30**. The word *propitiation* is from the Greek word ιΣλαστηψριον (Jilasthrion), which also means "mercy seat." The "mercy seat" refers to the place on the Ark of the Covenant where the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on the Day of Pentecost. The cover on the Ark of the Covenant was called in Hebrew tr\P)K^ (k^pp)r#Th), which is also translated in the LXX as ιΣλαστηψριον (Jilasthrion). The author of Hebrews, in writing about the Ark of the Covenant, says: "Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover (ιΣλαστηψριον Jilasthrion, "mercy-seat").[a] But we cannot discuss these things in detail now" (**Hebrews 9:5**).

Paul put in writing, as stated above, that God gave Christ as an "atonement cover," that is to say, the ιΣλαστηψριον (Jilasthrion). It is in the same vein that John jots down: "He is the atoning sacrifice (ιΣλασμοψ, Jilasmos, "propitiation") for our

sins, and not only for ours but also for[b] the sins of the whole world" (**1 John 2:1**). Jesus is the *how* of salvation for a lost and dying world. Christ is the site at which atonement takes place through faith. Unlike the Old Testament the "atoning sacrifice" in the Most Holy was looked upon by God only, but in the New Testament, God declares His "atoning sacrifice" openly for the world to see. One can only escape God's wrath in and through Jesus (**Romans 5**); one can only experience freedom from the dominion of sin in and through Jesus (**Romans 6**); one can only receive deliverance from the curse of the Law in and through Jesus (**Romans 7**); and, finally, one can only receive redemption from condemnation in and through Jesus (**Romans 8**).

Salvation can only come about in Christ, because God made Him our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption, and our mercy seat. As one reads the **Book of Romans**, one should observe that Paul makes use of the phrase "in Christ" eleven times in sixteen chapters.[3] Paul, in the **Book of Romans**, also uses the saying "through Christ" once (**8:2**) and the expression "through Jesus Christ" five times.[4] This slogan "in Christ" focuses on where salvation occurs. In the **Book of Ephesians**, the motto "in Christ" occurs fourteen times.[5] As stated earlier, this unique terminology occurs eighty-six times in the Pauline epistles, excluding Hebrews. Again, the *how* of salvation is Jesus. Even though Jesus is the *how* of salvation, Paul develops the means whereby one accepts God's salvation—faith in Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. This Servant suffered vicariously for the sins of others.

Isaiah records numerous "Servant of the Lord" passages in describing the activities of the coming Messiah. In one such prophecy, Isaiah cites God's comments about this Servant of the Lord: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (**Isaiah 49:6**). The NKJV renders the latter part of this verse: "That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah presents God as sending the Messiah in order to bring about redemption for all men and women—both Jews and Gentiles. This truth is set forth in the words of John the Baptist: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (**John 1:29**)! One can hardly read **Isaiah 49:6** and **John 1:29** without reflection upon the words of Jesus to Thomas: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (**John 14:6**). Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (**3:36**). This righteousness that comes from God comes through faith in His Son (**Romans 4:13**).

Jesus is the One spoken of as the Seed of the woman (**Genesis 3:15)** , one born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**), the Son given (**9:6**), and the Branch (**4: 2**; **11:1**).[6] Jeremiah, too, focuses in on the "righteous Branch" that Isaiah spoke of. Listen to Jeremiah as he calls attention to Jesus as a "righteous Branch" and Jesus as "The Lord Our Righteousness":

> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David[a] a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just

and right in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:5-6**).

As one reflects upon the Messianic prophecies, one quickly recognizes that Christianity had a life before its birth. In other words, Christianity had a history before its tangible history. As one reads the New Testament, one immediately recognizes that the Christ of history is merely the fruit of prophecy—prophecy given to the prophets through the Holy Spirit hundreds of years before it came into actuality. Christianity is totally unique in the world because of its reflex history—a history before its actual history. The One that Jeremiah speaks of—The Lord Our Righteousness—is the One that Paul writes about in **1 Corinthians 1:30**.[7]

The Branch

The Word *Branch* (jm^x#, x#m^j#) is a title that applies to the Messiah. Isaiah (739 BC) spoke of the Branch as the Messiah. Isaiah writes: "In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (**Isaiah 4:2**). Once more, Isaiah writes:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. [2] The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— [3] and he will delight in the fear of the LORD (**11:1-3**).

As noted above, Jeremiah refers to Jesus as the Branch of David (**Jeremiah 23:5**). This terminology is also descriptive of Matthew's genealogy in which he traces the lineage of Jesus the Messiah to Abraham: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (**Matthew 1:1**). Zechariah, too, speaks of the Messiah as the Branch:

Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. [9] See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes[c] on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day (**Zechariah 3:8-9**).

In the **sixth chapter of Zechariah**, the Holy Spirit reveals more about the coming of the Messiah and His name: "Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD'" (**6:12**). In **Zechariah 3**, one observes the LORD as Servant, a term that is frequently employed by Isaiah as a reference to the Messiah. In this pericope about Joshua (Clean Garments for the High Priest—**3:1-10**), one views Joshua the high priest, who represents Jerusalem (**3:2**), ministering before the altar in filthy garments, which is typical of defilement. Satan is mindful of his sins and issues an accusation against him:

> Then he showed me Joshua[a] the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan[b] standing at his right side to accuse him. [2] The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire" (**3:1-2**)?

The Scriptures do not reveal what the accusations were, but one can get a clue from **verse 3**: "Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel." One cannot help but reflect upon what Satan must have said in his accusations against Joshua. Did he say as **Habakkuk** (609 BC) had said earlier: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (**1:13**). How can one approach a Holy God? How can one who is defiled draw near to God? As one reflects upon his or her own life, everyone is chaff for the flames. Can anyone dare to take it upon himself or herself to approach God without a mediator? How did God respond to these accusations from Satan about Joshua? Listen to the words of the Holy Spirit: "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire" (**3:2**)?

The Jehovah-Angel said to those standing by to "Take off his filthy clothes" (**3:3**). Again, the Jehovah-Angel says, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you" (**3:4**). When God removes sin, then no one can bring accusation against the one whom God has cleansed. It is in this same vein that Paul reflects upon those "Whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (**Romans 4:7**). If God forgives, He will not count one's sin against him or her (**4:8**). When one is "in Christ the "Branch," God has snatched, as it were, a burning stick from the fire. This forgiveness "in" and "through" Christ, prompted Paul to write:

> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,[a] who[b] have been called according to his purpose. [29] For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [31] What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? [33] Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? [36] As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."[c] [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[d] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, [39] neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:28-39**).

Satan is silenced on the sole ground of God's choice—the Branch, which is Jesus. One is reminded of the words of Isaiah: "He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me" (**Isaiah 50:8**)? The only way God could justify the guilty is through the Branch: "I am going to bring my servant, the Branch" (**Zechariah 3:8**). Paul addresses the dilemma of Satan's accusations against the sinner this way:

> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

His Servant the Branch solves the mystery of how God justifies the ungodly—Jesus as the "atonement cover." God presented Jesus (the Branch) as an atonement cover (mercy seat) on Calvary. The description of Calvary is set forth in **Isaiah 53**, **Psalm 22**, and **Daniel 9:26**. God poured out His righteous indignation upon His righteous Servant the Branch. Isaiah expresses it this way: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (**Isaiah 53:5**). Again Isaiah says, "by his knowledge[i] my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities" (**53:11b**). This redemption is the mystery that Paul unfolds in the **Book of Ephesians** and the **Book of Colossians**.

How can one answer Satan's accusations? One can cite Scripture as Jesus did to Satan in the wilderness: "It is written." One can say "yes" to his or her sinfulness, but one can, at the same time, cite Paul's response to the human dilemma: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). John writes: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for[b] our sins" (**1 John 4:10**). One cannot stand before God in his own righteousness. Why? Paul goes right to the heart of the matter when he pens these famous words: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). One must be clothed with the righteousness from God, which can be received only through faith in His Son who is the Servant of Righteousness, also known as the Branch. This is the very reason that Paul rejects human righteousness and desires a righteousness that is from God:

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

One recalls, as discussed earlier, the words of Paul to the Corinthians in which he spoke of Jesus as our Righteousness, our Holiness, and our Redemption (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and raised for our justification (**Romans 3:25**). This One that is called Jesus is also named "the Branch."

Zechariah speaks of Joshua's justification through the Branch in **3:1-10**, but now, in the sixth chapter, he makes a startling statement about the Messiah:

> Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. [13] It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two' (**Zechariah 6:12-13**).

In this text, one can say that the One "whose name is the Branch" is the One that Paul wrote about to Timothy: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (**1 Timothy 2:5-6**). One can respond to the accusations of Satan by remembering the words of Paul—"But now"—after he painted a rather dismal picture of the plight of humanity without the Branch:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.[8] But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:19-26**).

Not only can one cry, "But now," but one can say in his or her defense that Jesus is my Righteousness, my Holiness, and my Redemption. In the words of Jeremiah: "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness" (**Jeremiah 23:6**). As a result of God's grace in making Jesus our Righteousness, one can only stand in awe with jubilant praise for the One Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. This "righteousness from God" is made available through faith (**Romans 1:16-17; 10:1-1-16**). "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe," writes Paul (**3:22**). Paul hammers away this truth over and over in the **Book of Romans** and the **Book of Galatians**. What is our defense against Satan's accusations? It is Jesus—the One who shed His blood for our forgiveness. Yes, Jesus is the "how" of salvation. Pay attention once more to Paul as he sums up what he states in **Ephesians 1:9-14** as the *how* and *why* of salvation:

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, [2] in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. [3] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. [4] But because of his great love

for us, God, who is rich in mercy, [5] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. [6] And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**2:1-10**).

The "Why" of Salvation

After developing the "how" of salvation, Paul then stresses the "why" of salvation (**Ephesians 1:12**). In summary Paul writes: "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (**1:12**). Again Paul says, as cited above, that since salvation is the "gift of God," one should never forget that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**2:10**). God's people are to be "completely humble and gentle" and "patient, bearing with one another in love" and making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**4:2-3**). Peter expresses the "why" of salvation this way:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

Every Christian is a priest of God. Under the Old Covenant, individuals brought animals for sacrifices as their offerings (worship) to God. But under the New Covenant, Christians make their work an offering to God. In other words, everything the believer does is done for God's glory. Even the most menial task is done to glorify God. Every Christian makes his worship an offering to God. The Christian makes himself or herself an offering to God through presenting his or her own body to glorify God. Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship" (**Romans 12:1**). What God desires of every follower of Christ is a heart of love and a life of service in God's kingdom. If one wishes to communicate the love of God, one of the best ways is through one's life, not just through words. It is in this vein that Jesus says:

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Every person is called to be an obedient child of God. One and all are chosen to do what God likes, not what he or she likes. Each one is selected for service of consecration to kingdom work. Since every Christian is a priest, he or she must present

his or her work to God as his or her spiritual act of worship. Are you conscious that you are a part of God's chosen people? Are you mindful that you are a priest of God? Are you aware that you are to be holy? The Christian community, according to the words of Peter, constitutes a "holy people." What does this mean to you? Someone who is holy (ἁγιö, Jagios, "sacred") is separated from sin and consecrated to God. One who is holy is different. Are you unlike the world? God has chosen his people to be distinct in their behavior from the behavior of the world of darkness. God has elected His children to be poles apart from other men and women in their daily walk with Him. What is the difference? Well, one can say that the difference lies in one's outlook on life. For the believer, his or her life is dedicated to God's will and to God's service.

The Gospel of Christ compels everyone who responds to the Good News of salvation by grace to be different from other people. No Christian can be just ordinary, for every believer is of God. Paul, in dealing with sin among the Corinthians, had to remind the saints that their bodies did not belong to themselves, but to God:

> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. [19] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (**1 Corinthians 6:18-20**).

Since Christians are a part of the living Body of Christ, they are to proclaim God's way of salvation to a lost and dying world. Peter calls attention to the "spiritual house" that everyone born of God is a part of. Listen to Peter as he seeks to call attention to the activities of God's chosen people:

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— [5] you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 2:4-5**).

Every Christian is a living stone, and the church (community) is a living edifice into which everyone is built, or added (**Acts 2:41**). Many believers today think that they can live in isolation from other believers, but this is not the biblical way. Christianity is community. It is involvement; it is belonging. Every man and woman only find their true place in life when they become a part of this living edifice of God, which is the Body of Christ. Solitary religion, as advanced by some, is ruled out by God. William Barclay is correct when he writes: "Individualistic Christianity is an absurdity; Christianity is community within the fellowship of the Church."[9] Why did the author of Hebrews warn believers not to abandon the assembling of themselves together if it is not important (**Hebrews 10:25**).

Again, the "how" of salvation is an act of God "in" and "through" Jesus. The "why" of salvation is to glorify God through service within the spiritual house of God. Today, the theme of "Onward Christians Soldiers" is alien to the experience of many Christian churches. In the community that Jesus founded, there are no mere observers or auditors; but rather, all believers are involved in ministry. Christians need to see themselves as a task force to win the world to the Messiah. To rephrase the words of

Peter, one can say that God called us into His service in order that we might become a fellowship of penetration. The meeting place of Christians should be a launching pad where Christians are propelled, as it were, to go out into the world to tell people, not who we are, but rather to whom we belong. Unfortunately today, many Christian churches place their loyalty to Christ upon their own unique, or odd, teaching of theology rather than loyalty to fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Today, the traditional gathering of the saints is a throwback to the Temple. The assembly nowadays is overemphasized as a worship service rather than as an assembly to push forward the strategy of winning souls to Christ and strengthening the saints. The church is the "company of the redeemed." The early church did not seek God's will in individual isolation. One cannot understand the idea of "company" without the concept of involvement. Elton Trueblood drives home this point when he writes: "The only purpose of a company is campaign."[10] Christians need to be actively engaged in finding out ways to get fellow believers on the production line of working for the kingdom of God. As one works out his or her salvation with fear and trembling, one must never forget that what one is doing day by day is in partnership with God. Sunday school teachers who are teaching small children and teenagers should employ this time to instill into their hearts a love for God and a desire to witness about Jesus as the Savior of the world.

God has called every believer to evangelize. Evangelism is not the profession of the so-called clergy, which is a throwback to Catholicism with its selected priests. The Christian Church, as a whole, does not use the word *priest* for its ordained, but the word *clergy*. Jesus told the disciples in **Luke 24** to bear testimony to the truth of His resurrection from the dead. Evangelism is simply the method of testimony—testimony about who Jesus is. When one is converted to Christ, one is called to be a witness about Jesus and His redemption made available through faith. The church is to be a fellowship of witnesses. In other words, the church was formed by Christ to accomplish His mission of evangelizing the world. It is in the regard that Paul writes:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

In order to reach out to people, there is a sense in which every Christian will have to travel light. Christians must be willing to sacrifice a certain amount of their freedom in order to witness for Jesus. It is not uncommon for many Christians to take Christianity too lightly. Do you see yourself as a taskforce for the advancement of God's kingdom? Do we think that Christianity is just sitting comfortably in pews and listening to the preacher and the special singers? Are you a soldier of the Cross? When Paul was incarcerated in Rome, he wrote a letter to the Philippians in which he spoke

of Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier: "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs" (**Philippians 2:25**). In Paul's last letter he wrote to Timothy, he encouraged Timothy to: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (**2 Timothy 2:3**). Once more, Paul, in his letter to Philemon, writes: "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, [2] to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home" (**Philemon 2**).

Are we soldiers of the Cross of Jesus? Can we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with meaning? If we as a fellowship are not advancing, we are already retreating in our spiritual journey. Are you committed to the cause of Christ? One must bear in mind that commitment is never real unless it leads to evangelism; Christianity must move forward. If one wishes true commitment to Jesus, one must always be conscious that commitment to the cause of Christ will never be effective apart from a fellowship of committed Christians. Do you believe in Christianity? If so, then you will place yourself at the disposal of Jesus Christ for the work He has called you to do. Mere belief, said James, is never enough (**James 2:19**). As you reflect upon your conversion, you should pray that God will help you know that conversion is not only an initial act, but that it is also a growing experience. God does not want His people to drift into spiritual idleness. He detests lukewarmness in His people (**Revelation 3:14-21**). Do you have a spiritual history in your pilgrimage of faith? Or are you where you were twenty years ago? Many Christians are the same today at the age of seventy as they were at the age of twenty. As one reflects upon the how and why of salvation, one discovers that the words of Peter reinforces the *how* and *why* of salvation:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [11] Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. [12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (**1 Peter 2:9-12**).

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[1] 2 Corinthians 1:20, 21; 2:14, 17; 3:14; 5:17, 19; 12:2, 19.

[2] 1 Corinthians 1:2, 4, 30; 3:1; 4:10, 15 (2x), 17; 15:18, 19, 22, 31; 16:24.

a Or *is from faith to faith*

a Traditionally *the mercy seat*

b Or *He is the one who turns aside God~s wrath, taking away our sins, and not only ours but also*

[3] Romans 6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10.

[4] Romans 1:8; 2:16; 5:21; 7:25; 16:27.

[5] Ephesians 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32.

[6] For a more detailed analysis of these prophetic passages, see Chapter 10 in this series of essays.

a Or *up from David~s line*

[7] See David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory: Christ in the Old Testament*, (Alpha Publications, 1866: reprint, Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001) for an excellent treatment of the Messianic prophecies. I am indebted to him for his treatment of the Christ in the Old Testament.

c Or *facets*

a A variant of *Jeshua*; here and elsewhere in Zechariah

b *Satan* means *accuser*.

a Some manuscripts *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God*

b Or *works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who*

c Psalm 44:22

d Or *nor heavenly rulers*

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

i Or *by knowledge of him*

b Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away*

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

a Or *our flesh*

a Or *reasonable*

[9] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 196.

[10] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 37.

a Or *be a sin offering*

The Mystery of His Will

Thrust Statement: **God wants His people to understand the mystery of His will.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Ephesians 1:9

As one reads **verse 9** in the **first chapter of Ephesians**, one is introduced to new vocabulary—"the mystery of his will." Within this mystery, one discovers election, redemption, forgiveness, grace, blood, wisdom, and understanding. Paul incorporates all of these blessings of grace under the umbrella of the word *mystery*. Paul is now getting ready to launch off into a detailed explanation of his purpose in writing this short Epistle. When Paul speaks of mystery (μυστηψριον musthrion), he is using this term in order to unravel God's plan of salvation for humanity to both Jews and Gentiles. This mystery is not something mysterious in that it is hard to understand, but rather it is the revelation that the Gospel is available to both Jews and Gentiles. On the other hand, one may speak of this mystery as Jesus (u^Wvy} y@vWu^). In Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, he goes right to the heart of this mystery and removes all underbrush:

> My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (**Colossians 2:2-3**).[1]

However one views the term *mystery*, it is still bound up with Christ (Χριστοψ Cristos as translated in the LXX from the Hebrew word j^yv!m* m*v!,^j, "anointed one"). Both **Ephesians** and **Colossians** should be read together. Of the one hundred and fifty-five verses in Ephesians, one observes approximately seventy-three parallels. **Ephesians 1:9** and **Colossians 2:2** are classic examples of parallelism. **Colossians 2:2** goes straight to the point, without development. On the other hand, in Ephesians, Paul

develops in great detail this mystery that had been kept hidden from ages past (**3:9**). As one reflects upon the word *mystery*, one discovers that the word *mystery* may be used of the Gospel, that is to say, "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (**3:6**).

The term *mystery* is employed in the sense of the unity between Jews and Gentiles through the death of Christ upon the Tree. In **3:4**, Paul calls this harmony between Jews and Gentiles the mystery of Christ (μυστηψριον του' Χριστου' musthrion tou Cristou). Even though Paul employs the term *mystery* with various insights, nevertheless, one is ever conscious of God's eschatological act in Christ—reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ (see also **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). Paul, in his First Epistle to Timothy (63/65 AD), writes: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (**1 Timothy 3:16**). The "mystery of godliness" is used here, so it seems, for the Gospel, that is to say, God's scheme of salvation. This "mystery of godliness" had been kept hidden from ages past. Paul speaks of this mystery to the Colossians: "The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (**Colossians 1:26-27**).

There appears to be substitution of the words *gospel* (ευζαγγεψλιον euaggelion) and *mystery* (μυστηψριον musthrion) in **Ephesians** and **Colossians**. In the **Book of Ephesians**, the word *gospel* appears five times[2] and the word *mystery* appears seven times.[3] On the other hand, in the **Book of Colossians**, the word *gospel* appears four times[4] and the word *mystery* appears four times.[5] In the **Book of Galatians,** Paul does not utilize the word *mystery*, but he does use the word *gospel* twelve times.[6] The following chart lists the Scripture citations from the **Book of Colossians** in order for one to quickly grasp Paul's use of the words *gospel* and mystery:

COLOSSIANS: GOSPEL		
1:5	**1:6**	**1:23**
The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the **gospel**	That has come to you. All over the world this **gospel** is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.	If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the **gospel**. This is the **gospel** that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

COLOSSIANS: MYSTERY		
1:26, 27	**2:2**	**4:3**
25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the **mystery** that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this **mystery**, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.	2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the **mystery** of God, namely, Christ.	And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the **mystery** of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Paul begins the **Colossian Epistle** with their having already heard about the "word of truth, the gospel" (**1:5**), and he concludes this Epistle with a prayer about God opening a door for his message in order that he might "proclaim the mystery of Christ" (**4:3**), for which he was in chains. This Gospel, or Mystery, had been kept hidden for "ages and generations" (**1:26**). But God had chosen to disclose this mystery to His saints. In this disclosure, God chose to make known to the Gentiles also this mystery (not just to the Jews), which Paul identifies as Christ—"this mystery, which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (**1:27**). Yet again, Paul desired that the Colossians would come to understand fully God's love in making known "the mystery of God, namely, Christ" (**2:2**).

As one reads the **Book of Ephesians**, one discovers that Paul unfolds the implications of this Mystery, or Gospel, in order to bring about unity within the community of faith. Christ's purpose was to create within Himself one new man. Thus, Paul could write: "And in this one body to reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) of them to God through the cross" (**2:16**). Following this revelation about God's mystery in Christ, he asserts something of the richness of God's grace revealed through the unfolding of this mystery. He strips away all the trappings by saying:

> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made

known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [6] This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. [7] I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10] His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (**3:2-12**).

In **3:2**, he speaks of the mystery that he had written about. Surely this brief explanation of God's mystery is found in **1:3-14**. Paul, in just a few words set forth the very heart of the mystery of God. The full implications of this mystery were hidden from prophets and angels. According to Peter, not even the angels of God understood this mystery, which was eventually revealed through God's community on earth. Even though the prophets wrote about Christ, they still did not understand when the events would transpire. Peter, in his First Epistle, writes:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

The "angels long (εχπιθυμεψω epiqumew) to look (παρακυψπτω parakuptw) into these things," according to Peter. The word *long*, or *desire,* carries within its bosom the idea of passionate desire (epiqumew, "desire, long for; lust for, after"). This desire, on the part of the angels, was so great that Peter employed a word that signifies "to bend over, to stoop down, to look into" in order to capture the intensity of this longing to understand this grace. The English word *look* is a translation of parakuptw, which comes from two Greek words: παραψ (para, "aside") and κυψπτω (kuptw, "to bend forward"). Luke uses this same word (parakuptw) when he describes Peter's reaction to the women's testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Luke says:

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. [12] Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over (parakuptw), he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened (**Luke 24:11-12**).

The idea of angels desiring to bend over, or to stoop low, was to understand something of the mystery of God unfolded in and through Jesus (ϛΙησοῦ Ihsous; Hebrew: u^Wvy} y@vWu^, "Joshua," which means "Jehovah is salvation"). Once more, the mental image of stooping low is graphically portrayed through the use of a human illustration. For instance, one stands on the edge of a cliff (for example, Lookout Mountain) and bends over and looks over the edge of the cliff in order to see what is going on below. The angels wanted to understand something of the mystery that had been kept hidden from ages past. Paul, so it seems to me, speaks of this very same concept when he writes:

> Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; [9] And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: [10] To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, [11] According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Ephesians 3:8-10**, KJV).

According to Paul, it is through the church (εϛκκλησιψα ekklhsia, "assembly, congregation") that the "principalities and powers" came to understand something of the manifold wisdom of God in working out salvation for sinful humanity. Since this mystery was foretold in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, Paul, in his missionary journey, relied upon the Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus is the one whom the prophets foretold. God's wisdom is displayed in the atonement of Christ. How could God be just and, at the same time, justify sinners—individuals who transgressed His holy Law? Paul addresses this wisdom in his Roman Epistle:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. [29] Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, [30] since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. [31] Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (**Romans 3:21-31**).

As one peruses the writings of Paul, one quickly becomes conscious of Paul's use of the Old Testament to give credence to his arguments concerning Jesus as the One that

the prophets foretold. During Paul's second missionary journey (AD 49-51), Luke reports the following scenario about his reliance upon the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and that He had to suffer and die:

> When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. [2] As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (**Acts 17:1-3**).

Following his stay in Thessalonica, Paul went to Berea. Paul's preaching found great success in this geographical area. As Paul analyzed the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, Luke records:

> As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. [11] Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. [12] Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (**17:10-12**).

Not only did Paul and Peter rely upon the Old Testament in their proving that Jesus is the Christ, but one also discovers that Matthew, one of the original twelve, began his Gospel with references to some of the prophecies found in the writings of the prophets. One wonders if Matthew's references to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophetic utterances were not the result of Jesus opening the minds of the eleven disciples in order that they could understand the prophetic nature of the Old Testament. Luke, in his account, gives a glimpse of Jesus' meeting with His apostles shortly before His ascension:

> [36] While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." [37] They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. [38] He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? [39] Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." [40] When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. [41] And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" [42] They gave him a piece of broiled fish, [43] and he took it and ate it in their presence. [44] He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [45] Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you

what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:36-49**).

"Every things must be fulfilled" that had been written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (This division, among Jews, is called **Tanakh**, which is an acronym for ***Torah, Nevi'im***, and ***Ketuvim***.). In His farewell discourse, did Jesus unfold **Genesis 3:15** concerning the "seed" of the woman? Did He discuss Abraham's "seed" through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed? What about **Psalms 2** and **22**? Did He talk about **Isaiah 2:1-4; 7:14; 9:-1-7; 11:1**? Did He make conversation about **Joel 2**? This essay is not intended as an in-depth study of Old Testament prophecies concerning the "mystery of His will," but only to stimulate the appetite for further study to understand something of the greatness of God's love for sinful humanity. In order to fuel one's comprehension of this Mystery, which is Christ, this study begins with **Genesis 3:15** and concludes with a brief statement about **Isaiah 11:1**.

Genesis 3:15: Seed of the Woman

Just a casual glance of the **Book of Genesis** reveals the early rays of Messianic glory foretold by Moses as he begins telling the story of creation by the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and eternal God. He begins this Book with a glorious statement about creation that is sublime and almost beyond human comprehension: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (**Genesis 1:1**). After man's creation and his being placed in the Garden of Eden, Satan (/f*c(, s*f*n, "the adversary"), the great enemy of God and man, wrenched from Adam and Eve their great heritage. In spite of the darkness that came over this couple, God did not leave them without hope of deliverance from their fallen state (**3:15**). God spoke to the serpent and said:

> Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. [15] And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring (seed) and hers; he will crush (strike) your head, and you will strike his heel." (**3:14-15**).

This prophecy, the first in God's written Revelation, sets before the human race the outcome of the conflict between Satan and God—ultimate victory for those who put their trust in Christ ("her seed" = the Seed of the woman). The Seed of the woman will eventually crush the serpent's head, even though the serpent will bruise the heel of the Seed of the woman by crucifixion. The unique expression employed by God, "the seed of the woman," or "her seed" never occurs anywhere else in all of Scripture. This expression is very striking. In biblical narrative, posterity is always reckoned after the male, never after the female. Thus, **Genesis 3:15** sets the goal toward which all history is moving—the coming of Jesus the Messiah. God announces this great event in a cryptic oracle. In this cosmic battle there would be enmity between Satan's seed (;u&r+z^ z^ru&k, "your seed") and Eve's seed (Hu*r+z^ z^ru*H, "her seed"). Immediately, after stating the enmity between the two seeds, God says, "he" (aWh hWa) "will crush you (your) head (var) r)av)," that is, the Seed of the woman would inflict a mortal blow to Satan. Moses does not stop with **Genesis 3:15** concerning the coming of the Messiah, but he continues to give other prophecies concerning the

coming of the Messiah to redeem humanity to God the Father as he writes, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, about the promise made to Abraham.

Genesis 22:18: The Seed of Abraham

Man cannot remove the curse placed by God upon sinful humanity; only God Himself provides the remedy. God ordained this feat through the One foreordained before the earth was created (see **Ephesians 1:4**). Jesus was appointed to remove this curse of universal judgment of condemnation (see **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). God preserved a remnant through which the Messiah should come. From Adam to Noah, God continued to protect this promise made in the Garden of Eden. From Shem, one of the three sons of Noah, God preserved the moral, spiritual, and religious realm. Shem was the one through whom the "seed of the woman" would be preserved. It was from the Semitic branch of the race that Abraham sprang. To him (Abraham), God gave the promise that through his seed (ur~z# z#r^u, "seed, descendant") all nations of the earth would be blessed (**Genesis 22:18**). This promise was made three times to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3**; **18:18**; **22:18**). Later, God confirmed this promise to Isaac (**26:4**) and reaffirmed to Jacob (**28:14**). The following is a citation from Moses concerning the promise (covenant) that God made with Abraham:

> The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. [2] "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (**12:1-3**).

The promise is more specific in **22:18**. In this passage, God speaks of the "seed" (z#r^u) of Abraham. Moses writes about God's prophetic utterance to Abraham, which is also reminiscent of God's cryptic oracle to Satan. Listen to the words of God: "In your seed (;u&r+z^b= b+z^ru&I, "by your seed") all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (**22:18**, NKJV). In other words, God foretold that He would bless all the nations of the earth through one of his offspring. It is through this particular seed (offspring) that salvation, or blessing, would come to all who have faith in this Seed. This interpretation also coincides with Paul's words to the Galatians about the announcement of the Gospel to Abraham:

> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying,* "In you all the nations shall be blessed." [9] So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (**Galatians 3:8-9**).

This citation from **Galatians 3:8-9** is reminiscent of **Genesis 15:1-3** and **18:18**. The only way a nation can bless itself is through the "Seed" of Abraham, which is Christ. Two thousand years after this promise was made to Abraham, a Jewish convert (Saul/Paul) wrote to the Christians in the province of Galatia the following comments about God's promise to Abraham as recorded in **Genesis 22:18**:

> Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in

this case. [16] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed (σπεψρματι spermati). The Scripture does not say "and to seeds" (σπεψρμασιν spermasin, the plural for "seeds" in Hebrew is: <yu! r`z= z+r*u!,m) meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. [17] What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. [18] For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise (**Galatians 3:15-18**).

Paul, apparently, cites the Septuagint (LXX, "Greek Old Testament"), which reads: εςν τω' σπεψρματιψ σου (en tw spermati sou, "in the seed of you"). The LXX is the Greek translation of the Hebrew. Like the English word *seed*, the Hebrew word *seed* (ur~z# z#r^u) may be employed as a singular noun or be utilized in a collective sense. The context is the deciding factor in interpretation. For example, the collective sense appears in the following Scripture citations: (1) "And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants (;u&r+z^ z^ru&k,)[7] also could be numbered" (**Genesis 13:16**); (2) "Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants (z^ru&k, "your seed") will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years' (**15:13**); and (3) "Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants (z^ru&k, "your seed") as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants (z^ru&k, "your seed") shall possess the gate of their enemies" (**22:17**). Even though the singular "seed" is used, nevertheless, the collective sense is obvious.

On the other hand, there are examples in which the Hebrew word *seed* is singular in meaning. For instance, Moses gives Adam's statement: "God has granted me another child (ur~z# z#r^u, "seed") in place of Abel, since Cain killed him" (**4:25**). Again, one observes the Hebrew word *seed* employed in Hannah's prayer to the Lord for a son:

> And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son (ur~z# <yv!n`a& z#r^u a&n*v!,m, literally, "seed of men"), then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head" (**1 Samuel 1:11**).

Once more, one observes that the Hebrew word z#r^u ("seed,") also translated "son" in **1 Samuel 1:11**. Since the word z#r^u has both individual and collective meanings, it is necessary to examine each context in order to ascertain its significance in any given case. The use of the word z#r^u in **Genesis 22:18** has its primary meaning in that of an individual of the race who would bring universal blessing and relief from the curse of universal condemnation. It appears, so it seems to me, that this promise to Abraham is but an expansion of the cryptic oracle in **Genesis 3:15**. The cryptic oracle in **Genesis 3:15** and the promise to Abraham in **Genesis 22:18** are but fragments (progressive revelations) of that "mystery" that Paul writes about in Ephesians (AD 60):

> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, [3] that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. [4] In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5] which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [6] This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (**Ephesians 3:2-6**).

Genesis 49:10: Until Shiloh Comes

Once more, Moses records another reference to the coming of the Messiah in **Genesis 49:10** by calling attention to Jacob's prophetic utterance. Upon Jacob's deathbed, he caught a glimpse into the future. He, through the Spirit, gave a general description of the conditions that would spring from his twelve sons in the latter days. He says:

> Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. [9] You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? [10] The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, **until he comes to whom it belongs** [c] and the obedience of the nations is his. [11] He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. [12] His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk (**Genesis 49:8-12**, NIV).

> "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. [9] Judah *is* a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? [10] The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, **Until Shiloh** (hl)yv! v!,l)h) **comes**; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people. [11] Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes.[12] His eyes *are* darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk (**Genesis 49:8-12**, KJV).

The NIV reads: "until he comes to whom it belongs," but the NKJV reads: " Until Shiloh comes." In the reading of this pericope (**49:8-12**), one observes that Jacob skipped over the three older sons (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi) and came to Judah, the fourth, through whom the Messiah would come. Some scholars interpret Jacob's word *Shilo*h as the name of a town rather than the name of the Coming One. This is based, in part on **Joshua 18:9** and **1 Samuel 4:12**, where Shiloh is the name of a town. But there is a difference in the spelling of the place name in Joshua (hl)v! v!l)h) and the place name in Samuel (hl)v! v!l)h). On the one hand, this name Shiloh is spelled eight times as (olv! v!lo) and three times as (olyv! v!lo), but, on the other hand, the spelling

of the name Shiloh in **Genesis 49:10** is different—hl)yv! v!,l)h. As far as the record goes, **Joshua 18:9** is the first mention of a town by the name Shiloh. There is no evidence, as far as I know, of a place in Palestine known as *Shiloh* prior to the time of Jacob.

Again, this prophecy (**Genesis 49:10**) is a continuation of **Genesis 3:15** and **22:18**. Within this prophecy (**49:10**), one observes that the phrase "until he comes" (du^ ab) y`-yK! K!, y*b)a y^d) and the phrase "to whom it belongs" are also found in **Ezekiel 21:25-27**:

> And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity *shall have* an end, [26] Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this *shall* not *be* the same: exalt *him that is* low, and abase *him that is* high. [27] I will overturn overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no *more*, **until he come whose right it is**; and I will give it *him* (KJV).

Ezekiel prophesied about 593 BC, several hundred years after Jacob, concerning the prophecy made by Jacob (**Genesis 49:10**). Just a casual glance at this citation (**Ezekiel 21:25-27**) reveals that Ezekiel, looking into the future, saw the course of Israel's history with the coming of the Messiah—"Until He comes whose right it is." Yet again, one must state that Ezekiel was acquainted with the Messianic prophecies (**Genesis 3:15; 22:18; 49:10**) since reference to the coming of the Messiah is found in **Ezekiel 34:23**. In this passage, he announces the Messianic shepherd that would come to take care of the flock. It is evident from **Ezekiel 21:27** that he refers to the Messiah of Israel by the clause "whose right it is." Once more, one is conscious that Ezekiel too refers to the "mystery" that Paul speaks of in the Ephesian epistle. One objective of this essay is to briefly notice some of the Messianic prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Messiah.

Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Hosea 3:5; Joel 2: The Last Days

This section of this essay will only cover a few of the Messianic prophecies from the **Book of Isaiah** in order to set the tone for a Messianic reading of Isaiah. Even though the prophets did not know when the Messiah would come, nevertheless, they prophesied of the events that were first spoken of in **Genesis 3:15**. Just a perusal of the **Book of Isaiah** (739 BC) reveals that the Book is a book about the coming of the Messiah. In fact, Isaiah begins this Book with a reference to the coming of the Messiah:

> The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. [2] Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD 's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it.[3] Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. [4] He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their

spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore (**Isaiah 2:1-4**).

The KJV renders this verse: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, (<ym!Y`h^ tyj!a^b= b+a^j!,t h^yy*m!,m, "after the days") *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established [a] in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it (**2:2**). The "last days" means the days of the Messiah. The literal translation of the Hebrew is "afterward" (/k@-yr}j&a^ a^j&r? k@n), which, in this context, is Messianic in nature. The Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew word as "last days" (εςσχαψταϊ ηΣμεψραϊ escatais &hmerais). Whether one uses the expression "afterward," or the expression "last days," one should be conscious that this expression in the Hebrew, as well as the Greek, speaks of the Messianic age. As one seeks understanding of **Isaiah 2:1-4**, one recalls the words of Jesus, as reported by Luke (**Luke 24:45-49**) as similar to the wording of Isaiah's prophecy about the coming of God's kingdom. Joel (835 BC) also prophesied concerning the "last days" in his now famous citation concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (**Joel 2:28-32**). Peter, on the day of Pentecost (over 800 years later) cited this prophecy as messianic (**Acts 2:14-21**). The events that transpired on the Day of Pentecost, according to Peter's discourse, are the events spoken of by Joel over 800 years earlier.

Matthew/Isaiah: The Virgin Birth

Isaiah 7:14

Not only did Peter rely upon the Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus is the One whom the prophets wrote about, but Matthew also relied upon the prophetic element in the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Christ. For example, Matthew, following his genealogy of Jesus, calls forth the prophecy of **Isaiah 7:14** to give validity to his claims that that Jesus is the One whom the prophets wrote about:

> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. [19] Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [20] But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." [24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (**Matthew 1:18-25**).

If one is to interpret **Isaiah 7:14** correctly, one should consider the context of **Isaiah chapters 7-12**, especially **9:1-7** and **11:1**. As just cited above, in **Matthew 1:22-23**, Matthew says, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" —which means, "God with us." The Greek text says, "Behold the virgin" (ιςδουΨ ηΣ παρθεψνö idou &h parqenos), not "a virgin" as rendered in the KJV. The child born in **Isaiah 7:14** is the son born in **Isaiah 9:6**, and this son born in **Isaiah 9:6** is the branch (rod or shoot) in **Isaiah 11:1** who comes forth from the stem of Jesse.

Isaiah 7:1-17 is one of the most hotly debated texts within the religious world. Some scholars apply **7:14** to a child of Isaiah, but, on the other hand, there are scholars who apply the Son of this verse to the future King of Israel—Jesus the Messiah. This author (Dallas Burdette) views **7:14** as Messianic. As stated above, this prophecy must be interpreted in light of **chapters 7-12** in order to see the implications of this prophecy as messianic in nature. This essay calls attention to use of the singular pronoun in **7:11** and the plural pronouns in **7:13, 14** as well as the phrase "house of David" in **7:13** with the purpose of clarifying more fully the implications of **7:14** as being messianic in character. Isaiah, so it seems, addresses Ahaz as well as the house of David. In **7:14** the "house of David" is addressed, not Ahaz.

Background: Isaiah 7:1-10

Prior to Israel joining forces with Syria (Aram of Damascus), they were bitter enemies. But with the threat of Tiglath-Pileser's Neo-Assyrian Empire, they joined in an alliance against the Assyrian Empire. Apparently Israel and Syria sought to get Judah to join forces in their fight against the aggression of Assyria, but to no avail. As a result of Judah's refusal, Rezin (king of Aram) and Pekah (king of Judah) marched against Jerusalem with the intent of forcing Ahaz to join in the coalition. The armies of Aram and Israel set up camp near the borders of Judah, about three day's march to Jerusalem. When Ahaz learned of this, he and his people were panic stricken. Where upon, Yahweh (hwhy yhwh) spoke to Isaiah and told him to go meet Ahaz, who was looking over Jerusalem's water supply and making his defense against Aram (Syria) and Israel, and to tell him not to be afraid. In addition to this message from Yahweh, the LORD told Isaiah to take his son Shear-Jashub ("A remnant shall return"), which was the keynote to Isaiah's message, with him to meet Ahaz (**7:1-3**).

Ahaz wanted to enter into an alliance with Assyria to protect himself and Judah from Aram (Rezin) and Israel (Pekah), an alliance that God did not approve. Ahaz was told not to be afraid, but rather to rely upon God. God did not want Ahaz to take action in forming a coalition with Assyria; God Himself would take care of the problem. Assyria's goal was not Jerusalem, but Egypt. Egypt sought to create a buffer zone between itself and Assyria, namely, Aram, Israel, and Judah. In order to calm the fears of Ahaz, God foretold the destruction of both Syria and Israel (**7:4-9**). Within sixty-five years both governments were overthrown. In 722/721, Assyria took the northern kingdom (ten tribes) captive; Israel ceased to exist as a nation. Yahweh called upon Ahaz to put his trust in Him. If he refused, Yahweh informed Ahaz that he, too, would suffer the same fate as Aram and Israel.

In **7:9**, God said: "The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm (Wnym!a&t^ al) <a! a!m l) t^a&m!,nW, "if you do not believe")[8] in your faith, you will not stand (Wnm@a*t@ al) yK! K!, l) a t@a*m@nW, "then you will not remain") at all" (**7:9**). The pronouns in this verse are plural, not singular. God, no doubt, addressed the men with Ahaz. In other words, the phrase, "if you do not stand firm in your faith," was directed toward Ahaz and his court. In English, the pronoun "you" can be singular or plural, depending upon the context for meaning. Also, the same form can be either masculine or feminine in English, but not so in Hebrew. In Hebrew, there are four different forms for the second person pronoun—singular or plural and masculine or feminine. In **7:9**, one observes that the two pronouns are plural in the Hebrew text, not singular as in **7:11**.

In **7:10**, Isaiah delivered a second message to Ahaz (zj*a* a*j*z). In this message, God switches from the plural in **verse 9** to the singular in **verse 11**. Pay attention to the words of Isaiah: "Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, [11] "Ask (;l=-la^v= v+a^l l+;, "ask for yourself") the LORD your God for a sign (toa aot), whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." The pronoun ;l= (l+;) is a preposition with second person masculine singular suffix. The phrase "ask for yourself" can only refer to the king. He refused to ask for a sign: "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test" (**7:12**). This outrageous attitude by the king prompted the prophet Isaiah to change his attitude toward the king. As a result of the king's faithlessness toward God, Isaiah stopped speaking, as it were, to the king and turned toward the future and spoke to the "house of David" (iw]D` tyB@ B?t D*w!d).

Ahaz versus House of David: Isaiah 7:13-14

In **7:13-14**, Isaiah turns his attention to a future generation as if already present. Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also (**7:13**)? The verbs "hear" (an`-Wum=v! v!muW n*a "listen please")[9] and "will you try" (Wal=t^ t^laW, "you make tired")[10] are plural in the Hebrew, and the words are spoken to the "house of David" (dw]D` tyB@ B?t D*w!d). The "house of David" occurs twice in this chapter (**7:2, 13**). This phrase is significant since it only occurs three other times in the Major Prophets (165 chapters). Two of the other three occurrences of this phrase are also found in Isaiah (**16:5; 22:22**) and the third occurrence is found in **Jeremiah 21:12**. In the Minor Prophets, this phrase only occurs in Zechariah (5 times—**12:7, 8, 10, 12; 13:1**). Ahaz' reaction appears to be a frontal assault on the "house of David—God's established the dynasty from which the Messiah (j^yv!m* m*v!,^j) would come.

The Lord offered to give Ahaz a sign of supernatural proportions, but Ahaz wanted nothing to do with this sign. Ahaz was prepared to deal with a foreign army to assist him in his fight against Syria (Aram) and Israel rather than put his trust in God. Again, listen to the words of **Isaiah**:

> Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? [14] Therefore the

Lord himself will give you [c] a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and [d] will call him Immanuel (**7:13-14**).

The pronoun "you" (<k#l* l*k#m)[11] in **verse 14** is plural. Since the pronoun is plural, one understands, at least from the context, that Ahaz was not alone, especially since these remarks are addressed to the "house of Israel." Once more, one should note the change of the pronoun in **verse 16** back to the singular (hT*a^ a^T*h)[12]: "But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you (a^T*h) dread will be laid waste."

The supernatural sign was not given to Ahaz, but rather to the dynasty or house of David. The sign refers to the supernatural birth of a son: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin (hm*l=u^h* h*ulm^h) will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (la@ WnM*u! u!mmInW a@l). " The woman in **7:14** is called "the virgin," indicating a specific virgin in God's scheme of redemption. The Son of this virgin is called by one of the most cherished names of God in the Old Testament— la@ WnM*u! u!mmInW a@l. The name "Immanuel" is composed of two words in its three occurrences in Isaiah (**7:14; 8:8, 10**). The name is composed of the preposition <u! (u!m, "with") to which has been affixed the first common plural pronominal suffix Wn * (*nW, "us") and the divine name la@ (a@l, "God") at the end of the form. Gary D. Pratico writes: "The etymology is easy; the theology of the name is profound."[13] Christians cherish this name because it speaks of God's grace and mercy in that God gives Himself to humanity (see **Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-14**). Yet again, Pratico writes: "The name la@ WnM*u! has come to symbolize and summarize the story of biblical revelation."[14]

Even though **Isaiah 7:14** is somewhat veiled before one's eyes, nevertheless, enough is said in the original context (**chapters 7-12**) to state with definiteness that **7:14** refers to the Messiah. In **Isaiah 7:14**, one witnesses a child about to be born, even though future—the "last days." On the other hand, in **Isaiah 9:6**, the Son is already born (though future) and proclaimed the divine king; and, in **Isaiah 11:1-10**, one observes the Messiah ruling (though future). The birth of Immanuel is extremely important in **Isaiah 7-8** (**8:8, 10**). Who is Immanuel? The text does not specifically name the Son in **7:14**, but it would be fair to say that the birth of the child relates to the future of the house of David. In **7:14**, God specifically says He will give a sign (toa aot) to the house of David, and that sign has to do with the birth of a Son (**7:14; 9:6**). Reading **7:14** in conjunction with **chapters 9-12**, one reads about some of the most significant Messianic prophecies in the Bible that focuses on the birth and the supernatural reign of a new Davidic king.[15]

As one reflects upon **Isaiah 7:14**, one is immediately conscious that this text is a part of the "mystery of His will" spoken of by Paul in Ephesians. As mentioned previously, Jesus opened the understanding of the Messianic prophecies to His disciples before His final ascension (**Luke 24:36-39**). What happened to this major Messianic prophecy over time? Seven hundred years after this prophecy, Matthew, following his genealogy of Jesus, calls forth the prophecy of **Isaiah 7:14** to give weight to the virgin birth of Christ:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. [19] Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [20] But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." [24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (**Matthew 1:18-25**).

Matthew had first-hand knowledge of the Messianic prophecies from the Messiah Himself. There is no indication of a double fulfillment of **Isaiah 7:14**. Apparently, this prophecy related directly to the coming of the Messiah. Matthew, as well as the angel, understood this prophecy in its purest form as predicting the coming Messiah to save the world. In the **first two chapters**, Matthew also cites Micah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. The following chart should assist one in quickly grasping the Messianic prophecies in these four Old Testament books, verified by Matthew:

CHART ONE	
Micah 5:1-2	**Matthew 2:3-6**
But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.	When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: [6] "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' -

CHART TWO	
Hosea 11:1	**Matthew 2:14-15**

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.	So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, [15] where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

CHART THREE	
Jeremiah 31:15	**Matthew 2:17-18**
This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."	Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.

CHART FOUR	
Isaiah 7:13-14	**Matthew 1:22-23**
Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? [14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you [c] a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and [d] will call him Immanuel.	All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" —which means, "God with us."

Micah (735 BC), contemporary of Isaiah (739 BC), corroborates **Isaiah 7:14**. In other words, **Micah 5:2** and **Isaiah 7:14** are complementary. Isaiah announces the birth; Micah announces the place. The Lord's angel in Matthew gives the interpretation to be attached to **Isaiah 7:14**. One should never forget that the origin of **Isaiah 7:14** is God. Whether or not one understands the full implications of the Messianic prophecies, nevertheless, one can say that as the "fullness of time" dawned that the Messianic character of the prophecies unfolded with clarity concerning Jesus as the fulfillment. Matthew claimed that **Isaiah 7:14** had its fulfillment in Jesus' birth. Even though this essay cannot focus on all the Messianic prophecies, the prophecy of **Isaiah 53** is an outstanding prophecy concerning the crucifixion of Jesus as the atonement for the sins of humanity.

Luke, who wrote the **Gospel according to Luke** and the **Book of Acts**, reports the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch through the preaching of Philip (**Acts 8:26-40**). One question that puzzled the eunuch was the person to whom the prophet had reference (**Isaiah 53:7-8**). Philip began with the Scripture that the eunuch was reading and preached unto him Jesus (**Acts 8:34-35**). On another occasion, Jesus stood up in a synagogue and read **Isaiah 61:1-2** and stated that this Scripture was "fulfilled in your hearing" (**Luke 4:14-22**). These two events (**Acts 8** and **Luke 4**) are given in order to demonstrate a consciousness of Messianic prophecies.

Isaiah 53 foretold the offering that would be made for the nation—700 years before the event actually took place. Prior to this prediction, God names the child Immanuel in **Isaiah 7:14**, which name implies God in human form (see also **Isaiah 9:6** and **11:1**). But one may ask the question, why the incarnation in **John 1:1-14** and **Matthew 1:18-25**? Even though God is omnipotent, nevertheless it still took the incarnation and the crucifixion to atone for the sins of humanity—a promise made to the serpent in **Genesis 3:15**. Again, this incarnation (God becoming flesh) is a part of the "administration of God's grace" (**Ephesians 3:2**) or the "mystery of Christ," or the "administration of this mystery" (**3:9**). Paul writes, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (**3:12**). Seven hundred years after Isaiah's prophecy concerning the One who was "pierced for our transgressions (**Isaiah 53:5**), Paul explains the why of this most unique prophecy which foretold the death of the Messiah:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

According to Isaiah, it was "the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the LORD" (**Isaiah 53:10**). Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus informs His disciples about His impending death—a death that Isaiah foretold (**Isaiah 53**). Matthew records Jesus' remarks about His impending death:

> From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (**Matthew 16:21**).

Also, after the Transfiguration, Jesus again informs His disciples about His approaching death (**17:22-23**). Upon His exodus from Galilee, as He traveled toward Judea, He again speaks of His forthcoming death (**20:17-19**). For a second time, one

may ask why the incarnation? God could not have dealt with sin and saved the world without His coming into the world by, or through, the virgin birth. According to Paul, God's holiness is a check on His righteousness. The only way God could justify sinful humanity was/is through the death of Jesus. God had to become flesh in order to make the sacrificial offering of His body upon the Tree for lost humanity. This is why the angel announced to Mary the actual history foretold by Isaiah seven hundred years before the event actually happened—a life before its birth:

> "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, [a] because he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us (**Matthew 1:20-23**).

Isaiah 9:6

The words "Joseph son of David" (**Matthew 1:20**) reminds the reader that the miracle of the virgin birth was the means by which God inserted Jesus into the lineage of David. One can say that the hm*l=u^ (u^lm*h) of **Isaiah 7:14** is the God of **9:6**. Even though the incarnation is extremely important and significant, nevertheless, the "Immanuel is the major focus of the prophecy, so it seems. The text (**7:14**) takes its full depth from the context (**chapters 7-12**) within which it is set. Just a casual reading of **Isaiah 9:6** reveals that one is immediately confronted with the "Mighty God" of creation, which explains how the child born in **7:14** could be born of a virgin. This title ("Mighty God," roBG! la@ a@l G!Bor) is only applicable to the One born of the virgin, not to a mere mortal. Isaiah writes:

> For to us a child (dl#y\ y#l#d) is born, to us a son (/B@ B@/) is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, [b] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**).

Isaiah saw the darkness of the nation, but he also saw the Child, or Son, that would be born to remove the darkness and to enlighten the world (see **Isaiah 9:1-2**; **Matthew 4:14-16**). The child that is born is the long-expected Messiah. In prophetic vision, the events of the future passed before his mind. The Messiah is represented as One Who is given. Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (**John 3:16**). Jesus is pre-eminently the *gift* of God. For Isaiah, the scenes of coming times passed before his eyes. In spite of the doom and darkness that awaited the children of Israel, Isaiah saw the darkness retired in this region—land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali—through the Prince of Peace. He saw the removal of this darkness through the One described as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace."

Wonderful Counselor

Isaiah lists four doublets (**9:6**) that emphasize the deity of the One spoken of in **7:14**. **Isaiah 9:6** provides the conclusion of what was stated in **7:14**. Immanuel's birth foretells the coming of the eternal God to earth (see also **John 1:1-14**). The One born of the virgin is called "Wonderful Counselor" (Ju^oy al#P# P#l#a you^J). The Child born and the Son given are called "Wonderful Counselor." Christians should rejoice at the words of Isaiah: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Some scholars separate the noun "Wonderful" (al#P# P#l#a) from the word *Counselor* (Ju@oy you@J).[16] On the other hand, David L. Cooper says, "The two words must be connected with one another."[17] The word *Counselor* designates an attribute of the Messiah, and the word *Wonderful* conveys the supernatural degree in which He possesses this characteristic.[18] Cooper also calls attention to the first word in the first two doublets. He says that the word al#P# (P#l#a, "Wonderful") is parallel to the word la@ (a@l, "God") in the second—"Wonderful Counselor" and "God of Might" (Mighty God). Jesus, on one occasion, spoke of Himself as "Counselor" when He speaks of the Holy Spirit as "another Counselor (**John 14:16**).

Mighty God

Not only is this Son "Wonderful Counselor," but He is also "Mighty God" (roBG! la@ a@l G!Bbor). This One that is called "Mighty God" is also spoken of in **Isaiah 11:2**. Listen to the words of Isaiah as he tells about the One born of "the virgin" in **Isaiah 7:14.** In **chapter 11**, Isaiah writes: "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power (hr`WbG= G+bWr*h, "strength" or "might"), the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (**11:2**). The expression "Mighty God" can only describe God-Hero, that is to say, One who is exalted above all humans and is God. One cannot read **11:2** without a consciousness of **10:20-23**. Listen once more to Isaiah as he continues to elaborate on the virgin birth in **7:14**:

> In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD , the Holy One of Israel. 21 A remnant will return, [a] a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God (roBG! la@-la# a#l a@l G!Bbor, "to God Mighty"). 22 Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. 23 The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land (**10:20-23**).

In this passage (**10:20-23**), the God of Jacob is called the "Mighty God." In this text, Isaiah uses the same phrase ("Mighty God") in such a way that it can only refer to God. This title is evidently an echo of the title in **9:6**. The term roBG! (G!Bbor, "hero") carries the same connotation in **Psalm 24:8**: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty (G!Bbor), the LORD mighty (G!Bbor) in battle." The Lord (hwhy yhwh) is "strong and mighty." Edward E. Hindson writes: "In Isaiah, a@l is always used of God and never refers to a man."[19] The translation "Mighty God" appears to be a correct translation of the Hebrew. There is nothing in the context of **9:6** to indicate that this title should not be interpreted in its literal sense.

Everlasting Father

The third title (du^-yb!a& a&b!, u^d, "Father of Eternity" or "Eternal Father") is further descriptive of the "Mighty God" title. In other words, "Everlasting Father" (NIV) is further corroborated by the preceding title, "Mighty God." The Hebrew word du^ (u^d) indicates *eternal existence.* This same idea is presented in **57:15**: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever (du^ /k@v) v)k@n u^d, "the dweller of everlasting"), whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place." This phrase could also be translated as: "inhabits eternity." The KJV translates the Hebrew du^-yb!a& (a&b!, u^d) as "everlasting Father." The New Revised Standard Version translates these two words as "Everlasting Father." This Son has an eternal existence. John writes:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being [4] in him was life, [a] and the life was the light of all people (**John 1:1-4**)

One can say that Jesus is the Father of Eternity or the Father of the Universe. As one reflects upon the phrase "Everlasting Father," one recalls the words of Jesus in His priestly prayer as He speaks of His eternal existence:

> Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all people, [a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [4] I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. [5] So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed (**John 17:1-5**).

Prince of Peace

Jesus Himself applies this attribute of "everlasting" in His conversation with the Jews: "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (**John 8:48**). Finally, Isaiah calls the Child, or Son, the Prince of Peace (<olv* rc^ c^r v*lom). Jesus is the One that brings true peace—peace between God and man. This peace took effect through the death of Christ upon the tree (see **Isaiah 53**). This peace includes salvation. This peace is a part of the "mystery of God's grace" that Paul writes about to the Ephesians:

> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, [b] called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— [12] remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. [15] He has abolished the law

with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, [16] and might reconcile both groups to God in one body [c] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. [d] [17] So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; [18] for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, [20] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. [e] [21] In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; [22] in whom you also are built together spiritually [f] into a dwelling place for God (**Ephesians 2:11-21**).

Even though Matthew does not cite **Isaiah 9:6**, he, nevertheless, cites the first two verses in chapter nine as Messianic in nature. He pinpoints the fulfillment of **Isaiah 9:1-2** with these words:

Now when Jesus [a] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. [13] He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, [14] so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: [15] "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—[16] the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned" (**Matthew 4:12-16**).

Isaiah 11:1

Even though Judah would go into captivity, nevertheless, the tree would not die completely. Again, Isaiah foresees the coming of the Prince of Peace from the stem of Jesse (**Isaiah 11:1-10**). In **verse one**, the prophet declares: "A shoot (rf*j) j)f*r) shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The key to understanding this prophecy lies in the eleventh chapter. The background to **11:1-10** is found in **chapter 10**. For example, in **10:15**, the prophet speaks of a forest to which the Assyrian army is compared. This figure of a forest is extended to the nation of Assyria. Almost immediately, Isaiah compares the Almighty to a woodman who would cut down this great forest—Assyria (**10:34**). This prediction about Assyria was fulfilled (partial) in the slaughter of 185,000 (**37:36**).

With this figure of a forest in mind, Isaiah speaks of the royal family of Jesse as if it were a tree that had been cut down—the stump of which remained in the ground. Unlike the trees of the forest cut down, the "shoot" from the stump of Jesse will bear fruit. Isaiah sees the time when the dynasty of David will be deposed and cease to function. But, at the same time, there will be a "shoot" that will come forth from the stump of Jesse and bear fruit. In other words, the day will come when one from the Davidic dynasty shall possess the fullness of the Spirit (j^Wr rW^j) in the absolute sense in order to execute justice and righteousness. **In 11:1**, Isaiah announces His birth

and His origin from the fleshly side. Isaiah captures this incarnation—human and divine—with the following words: "The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (**11:2**). The words of Isaiah are also echoed in **John 3:34**: "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure."

CONCLUSION

This study has not even touched the "hem of His Garment" concerning the "mystery of His will." Hopefully this brief analysis of some prophetic utterances in Genesis and Isaiah will whet the appetite for more in-depth studies in order to appreciate more fully what God has accomplished for sinful humanity. Paul epitomizes this mystery of God's grace in **Ephesians 1:3-15**. After Paul's introduction to this *mystery*, he gradually unfolds the *mystery* in all of its beauty. This *mystery* is what Paul explained in all his missionary tours. He preached Christ and Him crucified. An understanding of the "mystery of His will" will generate praise through evangelistic efforts to reach out to the lost and encourage the saved. Through the study of the prophets, one discovers a history before it is actual history; in other words, one observes life before its birth—prophesy and fulfillment. Without prophecy (history composed before it happens) the fulfillment would be without a foundation, and, at the same time, unintelligible. In the words of David Baron: "Christianity had a life before its birth."[20] Again, he writes: "The Christ of history is merely the fruit of the tree of prophecy."[21] This Christ is the "mystery of His will," as outlined in the **Book of Ephesians**.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless otherwise stated.

[2] Ephesians 1:13; 3:6, 7; 6:15, 19.

[3] Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19.

[4] Colossians 1:5, 6, 23 (2 times).

[5] Colossians 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3.

[6] Galatians 1:6, 7 (2 times), 8, 9, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14; 3:8; 4:13.

[7] Noun, masculine singular construct with second person masculine singular—Hebrew ur~z# z#r^u.

b *Judah* sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for *praise.*

c Or *until Shiloh comes*; or *until he comes to whom tribute belongs*

a established: or, prepared

[8] This identification of this verb with its suffix is: hiphil, imperfect, second person, masculine, plural The verb is from /m^a* (a*m^n), which means: "to be reliable, to be faithful, to endure."

[9] Verb, Qal (simple active), imperative, second person, masculine, plural, particle

[10] Verb, Hiphil (causative active), imperfect, second person, masculine, plural.

c The Hebrew is plural.

d Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls *and he* or *and they*

[11] Preposition with second person masculine plural suffix.

[12] Pronoun: second person masculine singular.

[13] Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001), 95, paragraph 9.18.

[14] Ibid.

[15] For an excellent analysis of Isaiah 7:14, see Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Messianic Prophecy Objections*, vol., 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17-32. I am deeply indebted to Brown's comments on this most controversial text.

c The Hebrew is plural.

d Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls *and he* or *and they*

e *Immanuel* means *God with us.*

a *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua,* which means *the LORD saves.*

[16] Stanley M. Horton, "Isaiah) in *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol., 12 (Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press, 1995), 79.

[17] David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person* (Los Angeles, California: Biblical Research Society, 1933), 183.

[18] Ibid.

a Hebrew *shear-jashub*; also in verse 22

[19] Edward E. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1978), 61.

a Or [3] *through him. And without him not one thing came into being that has come into being.* [4] *In him was life*

a Gk *flesh*

b Gk *in the flesh*

c Or *reconcile both of us in one body for God*

d Or *in him* , or *in himself*

e Or *keystone*

f Gk *in the Spirit*

a Gk *he*

[20] David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory: Christ in the Old Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, originally published 1886), 13. I am indebted for this insight about history composed in two separate volumes in two separate periods.

[21] Ibid., 14.

The One Faith In Ephesians 4:5: Jesus the Savior of the World

Thrust Statement: **The "one faith" is God's message of reconciliation.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 4:1-6**

INTRODUCTION

The "one faith" **in Ephesians 4:5** is utilized by many well-meaning Christians to promote divisions within the body of Christ. Today, there are over twenty-five ruptures within the Stone/Campbell movement that lay claim to this passage as their own unique property. The "one faith" is not generally associated with Jesus as the object of faith, that is to say, God's way of salvation by grace through faith, but rather the "one faith" is usually linked with doctrinal creeds set forth by individual splinter groups. If one endorses instrumental music, then, according to the opposition, one is not adhering to the "one faith." In other words, for some believers, the "one faith" is acappella singing, not instrumental accompaniment. For one to sing with instrumental accompaniment during a so-called worship service is tantamount to treason against God.

This is just one of the numerous problems that carves up the Churches of Christ into various warring factions. For instance, there are some groups within the Churches of Christ that raise objections to the employment of individual communion cups and Sunday school. According to this bizarre fellowship of believers, the users of individual communion cups and Sunday school are interrupting the "one faith" in Ephesians. This catalog of creedal statements for faithfulness is almost never-ending. The purpose of this essay is to analyze Paul's "one faith" in light of its context in order to promote the unity for which Paul pleads. Having said this, this essay will also explore other books written by Paul, Luke, and Peter in order to lend a helping hand in

comprehending more fully the meaning found in the Ephesian passage. This article will explore **Ephesians 4:5** in light of its full context—the Book of Ephesians as a book. Douglas J. Moo sums up perfectly the need to read a book as a book, not Scriptures in isolation from its intended meaning:

> One of the biggest mistakes we can make in reading the Bible is to read paragraphs in isolation from one another. Certain devotional books, by selecting daily readings from all over the Bible, unfortunately encourage this practice. But the biblical authors meant their books to be read as books. Reading a paragraph chosen at random from the middle of, say, 2 Kings is something like reading a paragraph in isolation from the middle of the latest John Grisham novel. To be sure, the various biblical genres are not really comparable to a modern novel, and some of the genres require far less sequential reading than others (e.g., the Psalms). But the point is still valid. We can get the full meaning from any text of Scripture only as we appreciate the way the author intended it to function in the context of his whole book.[1]

One goal of this essay is to read Ephesians as a whole in order to determine how the word *faith* is employed. This paper will seek to set forth the word *faith* in its context, that is, the entire book, not some isolated passage cited to give credence to one's brand of orthodoxy. This subject about "faith" is of such vital importance for the preservation of the unity for which Paul advances in his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus that it is necessary to develop this theme of "one faith" in order to assist individuals in keeping the "unity of the Spirit" (**4:3**).

As one reflects upon Paul's seven "ones" for harmony among the Ephesians, one quickly discovers that number five ("one faith") is used by many Christians, as stated above, as a hatchet to hack to death anyone who refuses to subscribe to their weird interpretation of Scriptures. This Scripture is wrenched from its context to justify separation from every individual who refuses to kowtow to the dictates of a particular factious group. And, finally, this essay will briefly investigate the Churches of Christ and their dilemma in lifting **Ephesians 4:5** from the author's intended meaning.

EXEGESIS OR EISEGESIS?

One should step back and look at the Book of Ephesians as a whole in order to capture the intent of the author's use of the phrase "one faith." What is the focus of this expression? If one seeks to make points that the biblical author did not aim to formulate, then one engages in eisegesis (reading into) rather than exegesis (drawing out from). In other words, when one engages in exegesis, one obtains the meaning of the passage by drawing the meaning from the context rather than reading into the text one's own preconceived ideas, likes, dislikes, and so on.

One must learn to listen anew to the biblical text. Individuals are so use to reading the Bible as many godly preachers and teachers have taught them that for one to deny traditions is tantamount to denying the Bible. As one approaches **Ephesians 4:5**, one must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to one's particular group, or interpretative community. Because of tradition(s), one must seek to uncover the mind of the author through his own writings; otherwise, one can postulate

various theories that are like a labyrinth from which one can hardly find his/her way out of the tangle. This paper seeks to remove a lot of the underbrush that has entangled so many of God's people.

ONE FAITH = GOD'S MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION

The problem that hinders so many Christians is confusion over the word *faith* (πιψστϊ pistis). The word *faith* can refer to that which is the channel through which the righteousness of God is imputed to man—subjective faith (inward faith—**Romans 1:16-17**). Or the word *faith* can suggest the message of good news proclaimed to the world—objective faith (the mystery—**Ephesians 4:5**). Also the word *faith* can indicate faithfulness on the part of individuals who put their trust in God's message of reconciliation. This essay develops the thesis that the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5** is the event of Jesus Christ Himself, also spoken of as "the mystery of His will" (**1:9**). In other words, the event is proclaimed as the gospel, that is to say, the means whereby God saves the world. In this author's judgment, the "one faith" is not good news *about* man, but rather it is good news *for* man. The word *faith* can be used as a synonym for "the gospel."[2]

ONE FAITH IN EPHESIANS 4:5 ASSIGNED

THREE DIFFERENT MEANINGS

This study calls attention to the subjective (personal) element of faith as well as to two different interpretations of "faith" as objective, that is, (1) a message of salvation—Jesus as the object of private faith, and (2) a compendium of theology—a partisan creed. As one peruses the many great commentators, one quickly discovers that the commentaries, as a whole, all seem to be in trouble concerning the exact meaning of Paul's expression—"one faith." There are basically three concepts, as mentioned above, advanced concerning the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**: (1) the quality of faith in the individual [subjective], (2) Jesus is the "one faith" [objective], and (3) a compendium of theology [objective]. One of the most popular interpretations of this expression is that faith is a "compendium of theology,"[3] especially within the Churches of Christ. For many Christians, this concept of a compendium of theology, through isolation from context, appears to have some validity, but, on a deeper reading of the context of 4:5, one discovers problems with this presupposition. This understanding of faith as a compendium of theology is the culprit that has splintered the body of Christ into painful splinters.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORD FAITH AS EMPLOYED

IN SOME NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Before analyzing the word *faith* in **Ephesians 4:5**, perhaps, it would be helpful to briefly observe this word *faith* in other New Testament books. Just a casual review of the word *faith* in the New Testament reveals a sense that is not commonly maintained by many Christians within the Churches of Christ. Even though one encounters "faith" as a subjective condition of salvation (the means whereby one appropriates salvation by grace), still, one must never forget that the object of

subjective faith is Jesus Christ. The two are wedded together. Subjective faith and objective faith are so intertwined throughout Scripture that it is sometimes difficult to determine which is which. In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he speaks of their subjective faith: "so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (**1 Corinthians 2:5**). As a result of Paul's message and preaching, the Corinthians believed (subjective faith). Then he develops the substance of his message and preaching, which in essence is the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**. Listen to Paul as he elaborates on the object of their faith:

> We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. [7] No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. [8] None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (**1 Corinthians 2:6-8**).

It is in this same vein that Peter, too, speaks of subjective and objective faith in his discourse on the day of Pentecost. He emphasized subjective faith—faith in Jesus—as prerequisite to salvation. Yet, this subjective faith had Jesus as its object. This subjective faith had to do with justifying faith, that is to say, faith is the means whereby God imputes to man/woman His righteousness. Faith is the means whereby man/woman appropriates the salvation offered to humanity by grace. Yes, Jesus is the object of subjective faith, a faith that results in eternal life. Once more, Peter tells the people: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (**Acts 2:21**). Each individual must exercise faith in the "one Lord." Once an individual has been put in a right relationship with God through personal faith in Jesus, then one seeks to bring his life into harmony with his new relationship with God through Jesus (**Romans 6**). It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Philippians:

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel (**Philippians 1:27**).

"Faith" in the Book of Acts[4]

As one peruses any book of the New Testament, one must determine the meaning to be attached to the term *faith*. For example, how is the word *faith* employed in **Philippians 1:27**? In this verse, Paul speaks of "The faith of the gospel." The context reveals that "the faith of the gospel" is nothing other than the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The context is the deciding factor. This is also true as one turns his/her attention to the word *faith* in the Book of Acts. As one seeks to understand subjective and objective faith, one must always look at the context. For instance, Luke gives insight into the subjective element of *faith* in his reporting of the selecting of the seven deacons to oversee the work of charity (**Acts 6:1-6**). In this section, Luke speaks of Stephen as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (**6:5**). The word *faith* in this context appears to be subjective faith. On the other hand, Luke calls attention to "the faith" as objective in his recounting of how the Word of God spread: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased

rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (**6:7;** see also **Romans 1:5; 10:16; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8**). In these verses, "obedience to the faith" means the acceptance of Jesus as the means of salvation.

In this section (**6:1-6**), one observes the word *faith* employed in two different senses. One must look at the context in order to arrive at the sense to be attached to the word *faith*. Since the object of subjective faith is belief in Jesus, one can surmise that a large number of priests accepted Jesus as the Anointed One of God, which is what it means to be "obedient to the faith." Sometimes the phrase "obedience to the faith" (υΣπηψκουον τή' πιψστει Juphkouon th pistei "obeyed the faith") can also refer to one's ethical behavior.[5] Here again, one must always consult the context in trying to ascertain the correct meaning. Luke also records the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin concerning "the faith," even though the words *the faith* are not employed, nevertheless, the following response to the Sanhedrin by Peter reveals that this is the substance of his statement: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**4:12**).

Book of Acts: First Missionary Journey

Island of Cyprus

The Book of Acts covers a period of approximately thirty years, beginning with Jerusalem and ending in Rome. Approximately eighteen years after Peter's message about salvation through Jesus, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark began their first missionary tour. Their first adventure was on the island of Cyprus (about AD 48). They landed at Salamis and proclaimed "the word of God in the Jewish synagogues (**13:5**). After this proclamation about Jesus, both men went to Paphos (**13:6**) and were immediately summoned by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, because "he wanted to hear the word of God" (**13:7**). What did he hear? He heard about "the faith" through the proclamation of "the word of God." Immediately upon hearing this word, Luke informs his readers that Elymas, the sorcerer, "tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (**13:8**). In **verse 8**, one quickly detects that "the faith" is employed objectively. Luke uses synonymous terms to describe the message of salvation. Whether one refers to the message of salvation as "the word of God" or "the faith," one is speaking of the same Christ event in this context.

Pisidian Antioch

On this same tour, the three set sail for Perga in Pamphlia, but John Mark returned to Jerusalem (**13:13**). Paul and Barnabas continued this missionary trip through Pisidian Antioch (**13:14**—275 miles NW of Paphos). During this period of evangelism, Paul preached "the faith." Luke informs his readers that Paul preached Jesus. In the course of his sermons, he said, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39] Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (**13:38**).

Iconium

From there they went to Iconium (**14:1**—71 miles SE of Antioch) and preached. Luke writes: "a great number of the Jews and Gentiles believed" (**14:1**). This is subjective faith on the part of the Jews and Gentiles. What did they believe? They believed the message about God's grace (**14:3**), which is also called the "good news" (**14:7**). In other words, they accepted Jesus as God's way of salvation. Jesus is always the object of one's personal faith. In **verse 3**, this gospel (the faith) is called "the word of his grace," but, in **verse 7**, this message is referred to as the "good news." Again, one observes the various phraseologies employed by Luke to express the same thing.

Lystra

After leaving Iconium, they left for Lystra (**14:8**—14 miles S of Iconium) and preached the "good news" about salvation through Jesus (**14:15**). Some Jews came from Antioch and stirred up the people against Paul. As a result of this confrontation, the citizens stoned Paul and left him for dead (**14:19**). But the disciples got Paul and took him back into the city.

Derbe

The next day, both Paul and Silas journeyed to Derbe (**14:20**—46 miles SE of Lystra). Luke says, "They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples" (**14:21**). After preaching Jesus in Derbe, Luke reports to his readers that Paul and Barnabas revisited the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (**14:21**). Luke summarizes the results of their return to these cities with the following words: "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" (**14:22**). Once more, one observes the phraseology employed to convey the same concept. To say that they "preached the good news" (**v. 21**) is the same as saying "the faith" (**v. 22** = the gospel). "The faith" in **verse 22** is objective; this "good news" appears to be the "one faith," according to context, in **Ephesians 4:5**.

Earlier, Paul in his sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch identifies what "the faith" is all about: "From this man's (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised" (**Acts 13:23**). After this announcement, he again zeros in on the very heart of the gospel (the faith):

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39] Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses (**13:38-39**).

These verses describe "the faith" in an objective sense. Jesus is the object of subjective faith (who believes).

Book of Acts: Second Missionary Journey

Philippi

Just a brief overview of Paul's second missionary journey also reveals the same scenario. Luke reveals that Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to go to the region of

Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from "preaching the word in the province of Asia" (**16:6**). Eventually, the trio, along with Luke, went into Europe to preach the good news of God. One of Paul's first converts was Lydia. Luke says that God opened her heart to respond to "Paul's message" (**16:14**). Following this encounter, a girl followed Paul and Silas shouting: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling the way to be saved" (**16:17**). Following this episode, Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in prison (**16:23**), Luke informs his readers of an earthquake and the conversion of the jailor. The jailor inquired as to what he must do to be saved. Paul's response was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (**16:31**). But, Luke does not stop with just the phrase "believe in the Lord Jesus; but rather, he then told him about the One he should believe in. Listen once more to Luke as he recounts this particular event: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (**16:32**).

Thessalonica

After this episode, Paul went to Thessalonica, then to Berea, and then to Athens (**17:1-32**). In Thessalonica many Jews and Gentiles rejected "obedience to the faith." During this second missionary journey, while in Corinth, Paul wrote his second epistle (AD 52) to that congregation in which he issued a warning to those who refused to heed the message of salvation through Christ:

> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you [7] and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. [8] He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power [10] on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you (**1 Thessalonians 1:6-10**).

For one not to "obey the gospel" is to reject Jesus as God's Anointed One. It is the same as that which John addresses when he writes:

> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:10-13**).

From the Thessalonian correspondence, one quickly learns that many Jews were not "obedient to the faith," which equals Paul's phraseology "obey the gospel." For one not to obey the gospel was equivalent to one not being obedient to the faith, which simply means that one does not receive Him.

Berea

Wherever this missionary group converged, they immediately went to the Jewish synagogue to tell them about the message of salvation (**Acts 17:11**). Luke informs his readers that the Bereans received the message with eagerness (**17:11**). The Jews from Thessalonica learned of Paul's behavior in Berea and went there to disrupt the "preaching" of Paul. Luke says that "Paul was preaching the word of God" at Berea (**17:13**). One cannot read about the events of Paul and his traveling companions in the various towns without cognizance of the various synonymous expressions used to describe the gospel of God. In this short section dealing with the activities concerning the word, one observes that the preaching about Jesus is called "the message of salvation" (**17:11**) and "the word of God" (**17:13**).

Athens

In Athens, Luke identifies the message as "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (**17:18**). Wherever Paul and his companions went, they preached the "one faith" that Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 4:5**. This "one faith" is the "good news about Jesus and his resurrection." For the full text of Paul's encounter with the Athenians, one should read **Acts 17:16-34**. Toward the end of Paul's proclamation about Jesus, he says to the Athenians:

> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." [32] When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." [33] At that, Paul left the Council. [34] A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others (**17:31-34**).

Some who heard the message about Jesus and His resurrection were like some of the Jews from Thessalonica; they refused to "obey the gospel" (see **2 Thessalonians 1:8**). Some, after hearing the message of salvation, were "obedient to the faith" (see **Acts 6:7**; **Romans 1:5; 16:26**). One stands almost awe struck as one catches a glimpse of the various ways the preaching of Jesus is described. The terminology employed helps one to quickly observe that no one term was used exclusively for the "one faith" that Paul chooses in Ephesians to describe the "mystery of God," which is none other than Jesus, the hope of glory.

Corinth

After his visit and preaching in Athens, Paul went to Corinth (**Acts 18:1**). Immediately Luke focuses his camera on Paul to give Theophilus, the one to whom the book was actually written (**1:1**), some details as to the activities of Paul in Corinth: "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (**18:4**). In the meantime, Timothy and Silas joined Paul from Macedonia (**18:5**). After their arrival, Luke says that Paul now exclusively devoted himself to preaching about Jesus. Once more, one gets a clear insight into the core, or heart, of the message of Paul to the Corinthians. Listen to Luke as he captures the gist of the message of salvation:

> [5] When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. [6] But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (**18:5-6**).

After Paul moved the base of his operations from the synagogue to the house of Crispus, the synagogue ruler, one discovers that God appeared to Paul to give him the spiritual resolve to continue to teach the Corinthians "the word of God" (**18:7-12**). Paul was informed by God to "keep on speaking, do not be silent." Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (AD 55), he reflected upon his stay: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**). Then as Paul closed this letter, he once more reminded them of his message:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [3] For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. [6] After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8] and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (**15:1-7**).

"Faith" in the Book of Romans

About ten years after the first missionary journey (AD 57), Paul writes to the Romans about this faith, which he calls "my gospel" and "the revelation of the mystery":

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began [26]but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— [27]to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen (**Romans 16:25-27**, NKJV).

Again, one observes synonymous expressions employed to describe faith in its objective sense: (1) "my gospel," (2) "preaching of Jesus Christ," (3) "the revelation of the mystery," and (4) "obedience to the faith." In the Book of Romans, one observes Paul employing "faith" sometimes in a subjective sense, but at other times, it is employed in an objective sense. The context is the deciding factor. Just as Paul concludes his Book with "obedience to the faith" (εισ υσπακοηψν πιψστεω, eis

&upakohn pistews, "for obedience of faith," **16:26**) so he begins his Book with the same phraseology (**1:5**). In **1:3-4**, Paul describes the message of the gospel. But in **verse 5**, he describes what God expects of individuals who hear the message about Christ. This is basically the same scenario that Paul expresses in **Romans 10:1-4**. In these verses, Paul calls attention to the Jews refusal of Jesus as the means of receiving God's righteousness. Thus, Paul expresses this rejection of "obedience of faith" as "did not submit to God's righteousness" (**10:3**). The full context of this section is:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (**10:1-4**).

Obedience of Faith

Equals

Submission to God's Righteousness Through Jesus

"Obedience of faith" means acceptance of the message of salvation by grace through faith. Whenever Paul speaks of submission to God's righteousness (**Romans 10:3**), he is essentially saying the same thing in **1:5**. It is through faith that one accepts the righteousness of God. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means whereby God chooses to make salvation available to humanity (**1:16-17**). Listen to Paul following his discourse on Abraham and faith:

> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (**5:1-2**).

"Through faith" is employed in a subjective sense. But this subjective faith must have for its object Jesus. It is, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is "the faith." The faith is not a collection of twenty-seven books; the faith is not instrumental music; it is not acappella singing; it is not grape juice or wine only in the Lord's Supper; it is not bread breaking or bread pinching in the observance of the Lord's Supper; it is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the World. This is "the faith" that Paul preached wherever he went. Paul expresses this concept in a most forceful way in his letter to Rome: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (**Romans 4:25**).

Paul employs "faith" in a subjective sense as well as an objective sense (see **Romans 10:1-17**). Again, the context is the determinative factor. In writing Romans, one cannot help but wonder if Paul had not reflected upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. In Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, He sets forth subjective and objective faith as essential to eternal life. One's subjective faith must have Jesus as its object. Listen to Jesus as he explains to Nicodemus how one comes to have eternal life:

> [16] "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-17**).

The object of belief is Jesus. As one peruses **Ephesians 4:5**, the context must determine whether the "one faith" is subjective or objective. When one approaches **Ephesians 4:5**, one observes that many scholars speak of this "one faith" as subjective, but, at the same time, they call attention to Jesus as the object of this "one faith." Some scholars advance the notion that the "one faith" refers to that quality of faith in the individual, which enables him/her to believe. Yet, the subjective element appears to be expressed already in the "one Lord," the fourth of the seven ones. This concept of the "one faith" as personal (subjective faith) seems to be at odds with the context,[6] even though one must have subjective faith in order to receive the righteousness of Christ. Whatever the answer is to a proper interpretation of "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**, one must never forget that one cannot ultimately separate personal faith from its object (Jesus). On the other hand, one can never separate Jesus from personal faith if one expects salvation

It goes almost without saying that there must be subjective faith in Jesus. But, at the same time, one must be conscious as to how Paul employs "one faith" in this context. In other words, there must be faith (subjective) in "the faith" (objective), which is Christ. In Ephesians, Paul employs both usages of the word *faith*. What one discovers in the reading of Ephesians is that subjective faith and objective faith (Jesus the object of faith) are like two sides of a coin. Both must be involved for salvation. Yet, in **Ephesians 4:5**, the context seems to use "one faith" for the "gospel. It is in this vein that Klyne Snodgras pungently captures the intent of Paul's use of the phrase:

> "One faith" looks back to the explanation of the gospel in 2:1-10, but reference here is not the act of believing. "Faith" is used here by metonymy for that which is believed, the content of the faith. The statement means there is only one gospel.[7]

The context of **Ephesians 4:5** does not appear to use pistis in the subjective sense as utilized by Paul in **Romans 1:16-17**:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

This passage (**1:16-17**) speaks of faith in a subjective sense. God has chosen faith as the means whereby man receives salvation. In **Romans 4**, Paul speaks of Abraham's faith: "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (**verse 5**). This faith is subjective faith on the part of Abraham.

Once more, Paul expresses this subjective faith as the means whereby God imputes to man His righteousness:

> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (**4:11**).

Paul begins this epistle (Romans) with a brief synopsis of "the faith" (**1:3-4**) and then concludes his remarks with submission to that faith (**1:5**). Listen to Paul as he captures the very heart of the gospel and one's response to Jesus ("the faith"):

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— [2] the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures [3] regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, [4] and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. [5] Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith (**1:1-5**).

The NIV's translation of **1:5** is understood by many as subjective faith, not objective faith as presented in this paper. One cannot determine from the translation which meaning the translators intended to convey. In other words, did the translators understand the phraseology as meaning ethical obedience that comes from faith or obedience that results in the acceptance of Jesus as God's Anointed One for the salvation of the world. No one is denying that there must be ethical obedience to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, but the issue in **Romans 1:5** is: Is "obedience of faith" the message of salvation? It is in this same vein that Douglas J. Moo oscillates, so it seems to this author, between subjective and objective faith in **1:5**.[8] Since Paul is not here to clarify the issue for the Christian community, then Christians today must try to arrive at a correct application through the context. Is Paul addressing the same issue in his examination of the Jews rejection of Jesus? Listen to Paul as he deals with "obedience of faith in **Romans 10:8-17**:

> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15] And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring

> good news!” [16] But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” [17] Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

“The word of faith we are proclaiming” is Jesus. This is the same message about Christ in **verse 17**. Many Israelites rejected the “good news (**verse 16**) about Jesus as God’s way of salvation. “The word of faith” would be equivalent to the “one faith” in **Ephesians 4:5**. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), in his monumental commentary on Romans, grappled with this very issue:

> *To the obedience of faith.*—Paul, as an Apostle, was commissioned to preach the Gospel in order to the obedience of faith. Some understand this of the obedience which faith produces; but the usual import of the expression, as well as the connection in this place, determines it to apply to the belief of the Gospel. Obedience is no doubt an effect produced by that belief; but the office of an Apostle was, in the first place, to persuade men to believe the Gospel. This is the grand object, which includes the other. The Gospel reforms those who believe it; but it would be presenting an imperfect view of the subject to say that it was given to reform the world. It was given that men might believe and be saved. The obedience, then, here referred to, signifies submission to the doctrine of the gospel.[9]

“Faith” in First Corinthians

A few years earlier (AD 54), Paul wrote to the Corinthians about “the gospel I preached to you” (**1 Corinthians 15:1**). But he does not stop with just that statement; he continues to define what it was that he preached (**15:2-4**). As Paul wraps up this epistle, he writes: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong” (**16:13**). Paul begins this epistle with both objective faith (the message) and subjective faith (belief on the part of those who responded to the message of salvation:

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength (**1:21-25**).

“The foolishness of what was preached” is objective faith (Jesus crucified), but the words, “to save those who believe” is subjective faith. The Corinthians were to “stand firm in the faith.” One can hardly read “the faith” in the Corinthians passage without reflecting, once more, upon the context in **Ephesians 4:5**, which appears to focus on Jesus as God’s liberating initiative to bring about peace and break down the wall of partition that separates Jews and Gentiles (**Ephesians 2:11-22**). One must emphasize, and not forget, that subjective faith has as its object the Anointed One of God. “The faith” in **1 Corinthians 16:13** and the “one faith” (μιψα πιψστϊ, mia

pistis) in **Ephesians 4:5** and "obedience of faith" in **Romans 1:5** and "the faith" in **Colossians 1:23** seem to refer to the same thing, namely, the gospel of hope. In the **Colossian passage**, Paul writes:

> If indeed you continue in the faith (τή' πιψστει, th pistei), grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister (**Colossians 1:23**) [NKJV].[10]

The context of this statement—"continue in the faith"—appears to be Christ, the hope of glory. As one reflects upon the fuller context, one quickly discovers that Paul identifies "the faith" as Christ. Listen once more to Paul as he expounds upon his thoughts in **1:23**:

> [24]I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, [25]of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, [26]the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. [27]To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28]Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [29]To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily (**1:24-29**) [NKJV].

From this context, it appears that "the faith" equals "the mystery" and "the mystery" equals "Christ, the hope of glory."

Even if one interprets, as many commentators do, "one faith" as subjective in **Ephesians 4:5** and not as objective, one must also observe that these same scholars also advance the idea that Christ is the object of this subjective faith, not some creedal statement as postulated by the various religious bodies. For example, H.C.G. Moule addresses the controversy this way as he seeks to correct the erroneous view that the "one faith" is a creed, unless one speaks of this creed as Christ:

> Πιψστϊ (Pistis) is here explained not of the Christian's creed but of the Christians trust. I believe this to be required, or at least strongly suggested by the general use of the word πιψστϊ (pistis) in the writings of Paul. Hardly ever, if ever, does he use it distinctly in the sense of creed. Of course some "creed," however brief is required in order to "trust," if it is to be trust in the trustworthy Object. But this is not in question where we are examining the use of the word πιψστϊ (pistis).[11]

If faith is subjective, Moule is saying that Jesus is still the object of this subjective faith. Jesus is the creed. If "one faith" were creedal in nature, then this "one faith" would be Jesus, the hope of glory. Even though Moule interprets "one faith" as subjective, he still speaks of Christ as the object of this "one faith." He does reject the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, that is to say, a partisan creed. In this same

vein of "one faith" as subjective, Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida are forthright in their criticism of interpreting the "one faith" as a creed, that is to say, "a compendium of theology":

> (5) One faith: the Christian message is one, not many, and it calls for the same faith, belief, commitment from all who accept it. It is doubtful that here the Greek word for "faith" means "creed" (as Murray would define it). In this context one faith must refer to "one way in which we may trust God" or "…trust Christ."[12]

These two scholars deny that the "one faith" is creedal in nature, but, on the other hand, both appear to be saying that the "one faith" is subjective with Christ as its object. One cannot deny that there is subjectivity on the part of the one who looks to Christ as the author and finisher of his/her salvation. But if one places emphasis upon a written creed (objective—compendium of theology) and not upon "the Faith," namely Jesus, then one weakens, to some extent, the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning Jesus as the unifying factor in reconciling the world unto Himself.[13]

It is difficult for scholars to choose between the subjective and objective sense, especially since it is almost impossible to separate the two concepts in an absolute sense. Neither concept can be far from the other. William Hendrickson expresses his views about the subjective nature of the "one faith," but he also cautions that one cannot separate the two:

> Favoring the objective sense are Westcott and Lenski ("one truth"), though it is only fair to state that the latter does not entirely exclude the subjective meaning. He say, '"One faith' includes our personal believing, but the stress is on the Christian faith as such, on what constitutes its substance." Simpson refuses to choose. Hodge and Greijdanus accept the theory that the term as here used combines subjective and objective faith. Abbott, Grosheide, Roberson, and Scott favor the subjective sense (footnote 101).[14]

This controversy appears, so it seems to this author, to be the case of scholars not reading the book as a book. They isolate this passage (**Ephesians 4:5**) from its context.[15]

The seven ones are an absolute proof of unity. It appears that Paul is setting forth something that is outside oneself (Jesus as the object of one's subjective faith) in order to withstand objective attacks against Jesus as God's way of salvation, which is the "one faith." Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that "faith" is employed in both senses in this epistle. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem humanity (see **Ephesians 1:13; 2:8; 3:12, 17**; see also **Romans 1:16-17**). Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus (**Ephesians 2:8**). In **Ephesians 4:5**, Paul, so it seems, is appealing to something that can unite fallen humanity. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as subjective or objective does not detract from Paul's emphasis about unity. In other words, it is only subjective faith in Jesus as its object that can unite humanity into "one new man" (**2:10-18**).

Faith in Jesus puts everyone on an equal footing. If "one faith" refers to a compendium of creedal statements, whether written or unwritten, then unity cannot exist.[16] This faith, even though objective, is something that puts one into a right relationship with God. Jesus is the only one who can accomplish this feat. He is the message of salvation. The backdrop of this epistle does seem to indicate that the "one faith" is objective. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as personal (inward faith) or objective (Jesus), one cannot be too dogmatic in his/her presuppositions. In the Ephesian epistle, Paul discusses both subjective and objective faith. Kenneth S. Wuest also advances the idea that the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5** is subjective. In the following statement by Wuest, he also calls attention to the fact that the "one faith" is not some human creed. He writes:

> "Faith" is not the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine and its respective responsibilities. It refers to the principle of faith by means of which all the saints enter into salvation.[17]

One can concur with Wuest's statement that the "Christian Faith" cannot be a "system of doctrine." As one reads the scholars, one discovers that over and over the scholars draw attention to the fact that the "one faith" cannot be a religious creed. Why? Just a perusal of the religious scene reveals that a "compendium of theology" can never unite. This observation is self-evident from the many divisions that currently exist within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Carl Ketcherside goes right to the heart of the cancer that inflicts almost every faction within the Churches of Christ who interpret the "one faith" as creedal in nature, that is, partisan creeds, not Jesus as the creed:

> It is a startling commentary on the destructive violence of the party spirit when one realizes that otherwise good and gentle men are betrayed into equating the faith which all of us share in Christ Jesus with narrow partisan tests of communion.[18]

Both Wuest and Ketcherside reject the "one faith" as a creedal statement concerning "a compendium of theology." Even for those scholars who interpret the "one faith" subjectively, they see the "one faith" as subjective in the sense that "faith" is the one means whereby God saves humanity through Jesus. But even with this understanding, the scholars still set forth the notion that Jesus is the object of one's faith. In other words, "faith" is the means, or the instrument, through which God imputes His righteousness to those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. As stated earlier, it is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between subjective faith and objective faith, which in essence are simply two sides of the same coin. One necessitates the other. It is by faith (subjective) that all share in the "one body" of Christ. Once more, Carl Ketcherside captures the essence of this "one faith" or "the faith" in his precise commentary on **Ephesians 4:5**. He correctly writes that the "one faith" is Jesus and not a compendium of theology:

> Compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. . . . It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses, and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25).[19]

"Faith" in Ephesians

Objective Faith (Jesus)

As stated above, one must consider the context of **Ephesians 4:5** in order to ascertain the intended meaning Paul attaches to this particular phrase—"one faith." He begins his epistle with the thought that God had blessed the Ephesian Christians with all spiritual blessings in Christ (**1:3-6**). He informs them that it is in Christ that one obtains redemption through the blood of Jesus (**1:7**). He also calls attention to the mystery of God as to how He could justify sinful humanity:

> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**1:9-10**).

F. F. Bruce equates the "mystery of Christ" with the "revelation of Jesus Christ (cf. **Galatians 1:12**).[20] In other words, the "mystery of Christ" equals the "revelation of Jesus Christ" and the "gospel" equals both. Bruce says, "Christ is himself the mystery of God" (**Col. 2:2**; cf. **Col. 1:26-27**)."[21] This "mystery" is defined in **Ephesians 2:14-16**, which is the creation in Christ of "one new man" (**verse 15**). This background helps to explain the phrase "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**.

As Paul reflects upon God's method of salvation, he reflects upon the gospel and their response:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (**1:13-14**).

This "word of truth" and the "gospel of your salvation" are equivalent expressions to the "one faith." Paul prayed that their eyes might be opened to understand something of the greatness of what God had accomplished in raising them from the dead (**1:18—2:1-10**). He further develops the fact that they were "dead in transgressions" (**2:5**, KJV). For instance, he informs them that

> God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (**2:6-10**).

The object of this saving faith is Jesus. After Paul zeros in on "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (**1:13**, KJV), he then states their response to this gospel: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your

love for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (**1:15-16**). But again, Paul does not stop there; he continues to develop this gospel with the following words: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (**2:6-7**). As cited above, Paul again expresses the means of salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (**2:8**).

In the second chapter of Ephesians (**vv. 11-22**), Paul describes what the "one faith" is all about. Then in **chapter 3**, he develops this "one faith" even further by describing the "one faith" as the "mystery," which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is here that T. K. Abbott has a relevant word: "One Lord, Christ; one faith, of which He is the object, one in its nature and essence; and one baptism, by which we are brought into the profession of this faith."[22] Whether one interprets faith as subjective, as Abbott, or objective (Jesus), the meaning is basically the same. In other words, even if faith is used subjectively, the object of one's personal faith is in Jesus, not some compendium of theology advanced by some faction within the Christian community.

The object of faith is none other than Jesus the Messiah. Again, Paul emphasizes the object of subjective faith with the following words: "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (**2:18**). Paul, throughout this short epistle, widens the "one faith." In **chapter 3**, **verses 2-13**, he discusses the "mystery " that he introduced in the beginning of this epistle (**1:3-13**). In **chapter 3**, he writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (**3:6**). He then follows this statement with the following thought: "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (**3:12**). The Greek text reads "through the faith of (in) him" (διαψ τη῾ πιψστεω αυςτου', dia ths pistews autou). This comment by Paul is similar to a statement made some years earlier to the Galatians:

> "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**Galatians 2:15-16**).

The words "by faith in Jesus Christ" (διαψ πιψστεω Χριστου', dia pistews Cristou, "through faith of [in] Christ") emphasize both the subjective (inward faith) and objective faith (Jesus). Then, in this same verse, Paul says, "So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus" (ηΣμει῾ ειὲ ΧριστοΨν Ιςησου'ν εςπιστευψσαμεν, &hmeis eis Criston Ihsoun episteusament, "We in Christ Jesus believed"). But Paul does not stop there; he does not want his readers to misunderstand how an individual is put in a right relationship with God. Again, he nails the point to the wall, so to speak: "justified by faith in Christ" (δικαιωθω'μεν εςκ πιψστεω Χριστου', dikaiwqwmen ek pistews Cristou, "we might be justified by faith of (in) Christ"). F. F. Bruce does well to remind believers that

> It is by this surpassingly rich grace of God, then, that salvation is secured for men and women. As in v. 5, "you have been saved" is equivalent to "you have been justified." What Paul says here about salvation he says elsewhere about justification, which is freely bestowed by God's grace (Rom. 3:24) and received "not on the ground of legal works but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). "Through faith" here implies Jesus Christ as the object of that faith, as he is explicitly its object in Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:22, 26.[23]

In **Ephesians 3:12** and **3:17**, Paul, in speaking of faith, utilizes the definite article before faith in both verses.[24] **Verse 17** reads: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love" (διαψ τῆ᾽ πιψστεϋ. Dia ths pistews, "through the faith"). Can one proclaim, or preach, "the faith"? Paul in his epistle to the Galatians writes:

> 21 Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (**Galatians 1:21-24**).

These verses show that "preaching the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." Richard B. Hays correctly calls attention to the import of this passage (**v. 23**) in Galatians:

> The expression "proclaiming the faith" in v. 23 also shows that "the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." "The faith" is not just a matter of inward attitudes of the heart; it alludes to the substantive content of Christian preaching, as summarized in kerygmatic formulas such as Gal 1:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This observation will prove important in interpreting other references to "faith" (πιψστϊ pistis) later in the letter.[25]

Objective Faith (Compendium of Theology)

Sometimes it is helpful to state a proposition in the negative in order to shed more light on its real meaning. The following is a brief analysis as to why this author, Dallas Burdette, rejects the traditional interpretation of the "one faith" as objective in the sense of a "party interpretation" of Scripture. As one glances at the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**, one has to determine in what sense Paul is employing the expression "one faith." Is it a "compendium of theology" or is it "Jesus." Upon a close reading, at least to this author, one is cognizant that "faith" is objective, namely, Jesus. Yet, in spite of the context, many still want to hold on to "one faith" as representative of their particular brand of orthodoxy. But the question remains as to the meaning that one should attach to this objectivity. Among the Churches of Christ, the most prevalent concept is that it is objective in the sense that it represents a theological party creed. But this philosophy is riddled with insurmountable problems.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THEIR DILEMMA

To illustrate the misapplication of **Ephesians 4:5**, this essay names godly men who seek to be true to God, but, at the same time, one discovers that these men are

promoting division rather than the unity for which Paul calls for in Ephesians. The unity for which Paul calls for in the Ephesian epistle is based upon faith in the one Lord Jesus. Garland Elkins (Church of Christ), on the other hand, identifies the "one faith," not as faith in the one Lord, but rather his particular understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Elkins writes an article on "The Silence of the Scriptures" in which he bemoans the fact that there are fellowships of believers who do not concur with his brand of orthodoxy. In this essay he discusses the so-called five acts of worship. In the following lengthy citation, he sets forth his understanding of the "one faith" as being associated with a worship service with five prescribed rituals within the Churches of Christ:

> These five acts of worship were the *only acts* of worship that the early church practiced. We search in vain for any other acts of worship enjoined upon 'Christians today. Therefore to count beads as an act of worship is sinful. . . . The Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not use mechanical instruments of music in worship." . . . One of the major differences between the churches of Christ and the Christian churches is: true churches of Christ are governed by what the Bible says. Christian churches are governed by what the Bible does not say. . . . The aim of true churches of Christ throughout the world is to restore Christianity as it was in the first century A.D. . . . In the final analysis whether people obey or disobey God is a matter of regard or disregard for the word of God. The only possible way for us to be united is to follow the simple plan of "speaking where the Bible speaks and by remaining silent where the Bible is silent" (1 Peter 4:11). . . No one was ever asked, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" for such did not exist. No one asked, "To which faith do you belong?" for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5). In a divided religious world the pleas of true churches of Christ everywhere is for a complete restoration of the Lord's church. We plead for people to go back over all the dark ages of corruption, to discard man-made names, creeds, doctrines, and commandments of men in the plan of salvation and worship.[26]

Elkins identifies the five acts of worship as: (1) teaching, (2) praying, (3) giving, (4) Lord's Supper, and (5) singing.[27] Elkins labors under the impression that God has ordained a worship service in which five acts (rituals) must be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be "true worship."[28] For those who do not conform to his particular interpretation of Scripture, they are not contending for the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**.[29] Not only does he identify the "one faith" with five acts of worship, but he also identifies the Church of Christ as the "one faith." He excludes any other religious denomination from being a part of the "one faith." For one to be in the "one faith," one must be identified with his social gathering. He says, as cited in the above citation: "No one was ever asked, 'Are you Protestant or Catholic?' for such did not exist. No one asked, 'To which faith do you belong?' for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5)." He excludes everyone from the "one faith" except his own splinter group. In his exposition of the "one faith," he fails to take into consideration that the Church of Christ denomination, of which he is a part, did not exist prior to Alexander Campbell, one of the principle founders of this reformation movement.

On the other side of Elkins' unique fellowship, there is another exclusive association that is known as the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement within the Churches of Christ. This group of Christians also cites this same verse to condemn Elkins. Why? Well, according to their understanding of the New Testament, he is not adhering to the "one faith," which happens to be the one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers (the bread must remain in one piece—no fragmentation), and so on. They, like him, identify the "one faith," not with Jesus, but rather with their odd interpretation of the so-called worship service with its five rituals. Just a casual reading of Ephesians reveals that the "one faith" is not some creedal statement issued by the Churches of Christ, but rather, it is the "one Lord." Jesus is the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**.

This "one faith," as illustrated above, is the message of the gospel, or the Word of God. If one interprets "one faith" as objective faith in the sense of a written creed, one again confronts an impossible blockage. There is difficulty in applying this expression to a body of truth as is generally advanced by many within the Churches of Christ. In seeking an answer to the above dilemma, one must inquire as to the following question: Is Paul speaking of an objective body of truth? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones carefully calls attention to the difficulty:

> In the eyes of these teachers 'one faith' means that Christians adopt and subscribe to one of the great Confessions of Faith, such as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England., or the Westminster confession of Faith, or the Heidelberg Catechism. Faith here, they say, means a complete outline of what we believe, a compete compendium of theology.[30]

Even though some Christians reject the many Confessions of Faith written by other believers, nevertheless, many of these same Christians adhere to an unwritten creed that is just as dogmatic and divisive as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and so on. When one sets forth a doctrinal standard by which all must adhere to or face excommunication, one immediately catapults a movement that will fracture at the drop-of-a-hat. If one defines "one faith" as dogmatic theology propounded by some meticulous group of believers, then there has never been nor will there ever be "one faith." If "one faith" means agreement upon all doctrinal issues, then there was not even "one faith" in the days of the apostles. Thus, Leroy Garrett correctly points out:

> On and on it goes. We are judged more by what doctrines we hold to than by the hold we have on Jesus. One is not "faithful" unless he is acappella or non-class or amillennial or non-cooperative or direct support. A congregation is not of "the faith" unless it serves the Supper in a certain manner or restricts its budget to non-institutional programs. "Obedience to the faith," a beautiful scriptural concept, is made to apply to every opinion imaginable, and if one does not kow-tow to a particular opinion, held to so dearly by the party, he is branded as *unfaithful*. And so we "convert" each other to our own sects, announcing to the world that someone has found "the faith" and is no longer in error. This usually has little to do with a person's relationship to Jesus as Lord. If one leaves us, we presume that he has

"departed from the faith," when in fact he just might leave us for the sake of the faith.[31]

One cannot take the "one faith" to mean complete agreement about an absolute digest of doctrinal declaration in the written Word. For one to make the "one faith" mean total compliance in doctrinal matters, then this understanding would violate the very intent of this epistle. One thing that the scholars agree on is this: the "one faith" is not a system of dogmatic theology. Most scholars rule out this objective sense of a "compendium of theology," period. In the early church, there were differences in understanding concerning many issues, but they were not accused of preaching another gospel, unless they added something to Jesus as God's way of salvation. For example, Paul's letter to the Corinthians reveals that Paul was conscious that within the Christian community believers were at various levels in understanding, but they were never accused of departing from "the faith." One should listen in on Paul as he discusses limited knowledge within the Corinthian congregation. He writes:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God (**1 Corinthians 8:1-3**).

Within this short paragraph, Paul calls attention to the fact that no man knows everything, as he ought to know. Even though some laid claim to "we all possess knowledge," nevertheless they were warned that knowledge can puff an individual up, but, on the other hand, love can build one up. It is true that some were right and some were wrong in their views concerning idols; yet, in spite of this deficiency in knowledge, Paul drove home the point that if one loves God, then God knows this individual, in spite of famine in discernment. Just a perusal of the **eighth chapter of First Corinthians** reveals ignorance, on the part of some, concerning the Lord Jesus. Listen once more to Paul as he calls for toleration for the weak:

> Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do (**8:6-8**).

Paul is conscious that there is just one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, but he goes on to say, "Not everyone knows this." For a second time, one wonders why Paul did not accuse the weak Christians of abandoning the "one faith." How did Paul deal with the ones who did not get the picture flawlessly? Again, one should pay attention to Paul as he seeks to capture the very heart of unity among the Corinthians:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ (**8:9-12**).

Paul, too, deals with differences within the congregation at Rome. This epistle to the Romans is quite revealing in that Paul details how Christians are to get along, even when there were different viewpoints. **Chapters fourteen and fifteen of Romans** go to the very core of Christian unity in spite of a lack of understanding. Listen to the following admonitions:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2] One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables (**Romans 14:1-2**).

> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**14:4**).
> One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (**14:5**).

> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (**15:7**).

If an individual refuses to practice the spirit of toleration toward the weak, Paul warns the Christians at Rome to keep an eye on the brother who refuses to make allowances for differences (**16:17**). It is difficult for many Christians to read the Scriptures with correct understanding because of their traditions. The faith of the fathers frequently becomes the watchword of orthodoxy. One must continue to hammer away at the traditions that divide God's people. Another Christian writer who does not subscribe to the "one faith" as equivalent to the message of the gospel is Goebel Music. Music, like so many leaders within the Churches of Christ, applies **Ephesians 4:5** to the theological creed of his particular party. He, too, laments that

> The great and beloved body of Christ today is being ripped apart by the sawblade of insidious doctrines, one such being that of "Unity in Diversity." This is one of the most treacherous, double-tongued, underhanded, delusive, guileful, cunning, slippery, intriguing, crooked, questionable, fishy and deceitful doctrines and must be met with a head-on onslaught! It is totally unbiblical, completely sectarian and has nothing at all to do with New Testament Christianity. . . . . Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith. Paul, in Ephesians 4, tells us of the "Unity Platform." Unity in diversity is an insidious doctrine and the answer is simple. The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths! However, it talks repeatedly about

> THE ONE FAITH! And we are told to believe the same thing so we can speak the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10).[32]

His overall views concerning **Ephesians 4:5** are not supported by the context. One cannot question his statement: "Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith."[33] But the problem with his exposition is that he equates the "unity of faith" with his particular brand of orthodoxy. Again, he is correct when he writes, "The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths!" But what does Music mean by the "diversity of faiths"? He is writing about Christians who use instrumental music, and Christians who advance the biblical concept of "unity in diversity" as holding to another gospel. To strengthen his religious reasoning, he incorrectly applies **1 Corinthians 1:10** to reinforce his misapplication of **Ephesians 4:5**.

Just a brief reading of **First Corinthians**, as demonstrated above, reveals his misapplication of **1 Corinthians 1:10**. Whatever Paul is saying in this passage cannot possibly be what Music is saying. Otherwise, this passage would contradict **chapters 8 through 13 of First Corinthians**. The "one faith" is the message of the gospel, not instrumental music, not Sunday school, not grape juice only, not wine only, not Bible colleges, and so on. He identifies the "one faith" with his understanding of the Bible in references to these issues. Listen to Music as he seeks to elaborate on his concept of the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**:

> Anything else is a splattered unity, or perhaps I should say, union. It is a systematized and sectarianized unity for joining the church of your choice and bringing the instrument in the "back door." There is just one faith, just like there is one Lord. There are no more faiths than there are Lords.[34]

Again, one cannot deny his statement: "there is just one faith, just like there is one Lord." What one does deny, and must deny, is his equation of the "one faith" with his identifying mark of prevailing attitude—my interpretation and application. In essence, he interprets the "one faith" as his understanding of the Bible. When one advances dogmatic theology as the "one faith," then this belief system opens a Pandora's box. This incredible philosophy, advanced by Elkins and Music, has sliced the body of Christ into warring factions that are constantly at each other's throats. The interpretation that is in vogue among many Churches of Christ forces the philosophy of "unity-in-conformity," not "unity-in-diversity." In fact, most of the party journals decry "unity-in-diversity" as of the devil.

If one reflects upon the consequences of the outcome of the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, then one must acknowledge that there is something wrong with the traditional interpretation. The "one faith" cannot possibly be a complete system of theology. Christians can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Carl Ketcherside, as cited earlier, correctly says:

> The one faith is not a compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. It is not a collection of letters, even though divinely authorized and produced by agency of the Spirit. It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).[35]

One observes that Ketcherside defines the "one faith" as Jesus. The traditional interpretation of **Ephesians 4:5** fractures the body of Christ rather than unites the body of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ there are as many *faiths* as there are splinter groups if one interprets "one faith" with doctrinal issues. When one interprets "one faith" as *acappella* singing, instrumental music, wine only, grape juice only, one container in the Lord's Supper, individual cups in the Lord's Supper, breaking bread, pinching bread, orphan homes, Bible colleges, located preachers, baptisteries, women not cutting their hair, women wearing hats in the assembly, and so one, one creates an atmosphere in which division proliferates. Another citation from Garrett is to the point:

> This is the nature of faith. It is rooted in a Person, the one who is the bread come down out of heaven. It is not loyalty to any doctrinal system, however praiseworthy be that system. It is a mark of sectarianism to regard faith as assent to a particular set of tenets. Our *faithful* brothers and sisters are all those everywhere who are in Christ Jesus, implicitly trusting in him as the Lord of their lives.[36]

For many Christians the "one faith" amounts to "one opinion." The "one faith" does not consist of a so-called new law, which is generally interpreted as the New Testament. As a whole, within the Churches of Christ, the "one faith" is boiled down to its lowest common denominator—one opinion. Alexander Campbell, the founder of the denominational Church of Christ, once said with his typical pungency:

> The Apostle says, 'There is one body, one spirit (sic), one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all.' But nowhere is it said in the sacred book, There (sic) is *one opinion*. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate ("expound"—RDB).[37]

God has never made faultlessness in knowledge a condition of salvation. If He had, none could be saved. Just a casual glance at **1 Corinthians 8** and **Romans 14 and 15** dispel any such belief. This analysis of the subjective (personal faith, which is essential for salvation) and objective (compendium of theology, which is not essential for salvation) faith brings one to the very heart of the "one faith" included in the seven ones, which are essential for Christian unity.

As one studies the various factions within the Churches of Christ, one quickly realizes that an interpretation of "the faith" depends upon each contentious company. No two parties define "the faith" the same way. Instead of "one faith," as stated earlier, there are as many faiths as there are splinter groups. Ketcherside has rightly picked up the folly of assigning a meaning to the "one faith" as a compendium of theology:

> To postulate that one must have perfect knowledge of every detail of revelation is to require inerrancy and infallibility and to demand that he be God. This is what I call "the Haman's gallows argument." If it is affirmed

that fellowship with ourselves is contingent upon knowing all we know and understanding everything as we do, then our fellowship with God is dependent upon our knowing all that God knows and understanding everything as He does. Since no one is rash enough to claim this for himself, he admits he is not in fellowship with God, and damns himself by the argument he concocted to deny others. "By what judgment you judge you will be judged."[38]

CONCLUSION

Objective Faith (Message of God's Way of Salvation)

The "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5** is Jesus. This faith proclaims what Jesus has done for humanity. In other words, this "one faith" is the very heart of the gospel. When one reflects upon this "one faith," one mulls over the centrality of the cross of Jesus. This "one faith" is about the atonement and resurrection of Christ in which He put away the sins of the world. This "one faith" is about the central truth of the gospel—Jesus who gave Himself for our sins. The "one faith" that Paul addresses in the Ephesian Epistle is the very essence of the gospel—"who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (**2 Corinthians 5:18**). Christians can only appropriate Christ through faith (personal). Christians believe that God sent His Son to die for their salvation.

This faith is something upon which all Christians must agree. This "one faith" must be a belief in the "one Lord." This is the message that is at the very heart of the "one faith" that Paul emphasizes in the unity section (**Ephesians 4:1-6**). This "one faith" cuts across all barriers and unites all who put their trust in Jesus for liberation. Again, Paul expresses this "one faith" is the beginning of his first letter to Corinth:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

How does one appropriate this "one faith"? It is through faith, or trust, in Jesus, not through works. This is the substance of Paul's letter to the Romans.

> [16] I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:16-17**).

The gospel, so it seems, is the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**. This is the one message that Paul carefully and thoughtfully develops in the **Book of Romans**. The **first four chapters of Romans** are dedicated to this great theme of justification by faith. For Paul, justification begins and ends with faith. It is all God's doing. Prior to the coming of Christ, Paul emphasizes that the Jews were under Law, but with the coming of Christ something new came. Paul explains this "one faith" this way:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

Paul had just painted a rather dismal picture of humanity under Law. Then he uses two of the greatest words in all of the human language—"but now"—to express the "one faith." The **Book of Romans** (AD 57) is an excellent commentary on the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**. Take note once more to the words of Paul as he zeros in on the very core of the "one faith":

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (**Romans 10:8-11**).

What is the "word of faith" that Paul proclaims? It is (1) "Jesus is Lord" and (2) His resurrection. One must respond to the message of the cross ("one faith") with a vital personal faith (**1:16-17**; **4:3**). How does this living or subjective faith in Jesus come about? This kind of faith is generated through the proclamation of the gospel: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (**10:17**). Everyone who hears this announcement about Christ and believes will be saved: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (**10:13**). In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul develops the "one faith," which is God's method of salvation—Jesus. In speaking of Abraham's faith, Paul informs his readers that what was said to Abraham was also said for the benefit of everyone who is willing to put his/her trust in Jesus. This concept is fully worked out by Paul:

> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, [24] but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. [25] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (**4:23-25**).

The "one faith" that unites is: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." The "one faith" is an accomplishment of God. Many do not allow the gospel to be what it is by substituting their own works and their own accomplishments in the hope of eternal life. When one asserts justification by works and not by the finished work of Christ, then this individual proclaims another gospel. As one peruses the Book of Galatians (AD 48/49), one also discovers that this

book too is devoted exclusively to the same theme. Some Judaizers had sought to undermine the "one faith" by denying that justification is by faith in the completed work of Christ upon the cross.

Thus, he goes right to the core of the problem: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (**Galatians 5:4**). The act that reconciles one to God is not one's own act, but rather it is the act of God that brings together sinful men/women to Himself. Paul, in the **Book of Galatians**, confronts the issue of justification face-to-face with the adversaries. The question about justification is: is it by works or through faith? He sets forth the dilemma in the beginning of this epistle:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—[7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (**Galatians 1:9**).

If you have not read the **Book of Galatians** recently, you should reread this book to see what the "one faith" is all about. In **chapter two**, Paul discusses his confrontation with Peter and accuses him and the others of "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (**2:14**). After analyzing the problems, he writes down: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (**2:21**). Again, Paul expands his arguments about the makeup of the gospel. In this enlargement of the good news, he adds:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**3:6-9**).

Paul says that almost two thousand years earlier that the gospel was preached to Abraham. The word *gospel* is frequently identified with one's brand of orthodoxy, not as good news about God's way of justification by grace through faith in Jesus. If one accepts the traditional interpretation of **Galatians 1:6-9**, one wonders if God preached to Abraham the sinfulness of Instrumental music, the sinfulness of individual cups, the sinfulness of Sunday school, the sinfulness of Bible colleges, and so on. Whatever the gospel is, this gospel was proclaimed to Abraham. As one continues to read the **third chapter of Galatians**, one quickly sees that Paul identifies this gospel as Jesus:

> Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. [16] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The

> Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ (**3:15-16**).

The "gospel" and the "one faith" are equivalent terms that describe the same person. This gospel of justification is equivalent to the "word of faith" that Paul makes known to the Romans (**Romans 10:8**), which is also equivalent to the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**. The "word of faith" refers to what he writes in **Romans 10:6-11**:

> But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) [7] "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Paul contrasts the "word of faith" with the works of the Law. The "word of faith" is Jesus. With the heart one believes in Jesus. Anyone who believes in Jesus is justified. This Jesus is the "one faith" that can bring together the people of God. This "word of faith" is not, as stated above, a compendium of theology put forth by various offshoots within the fragmented body of Christ. All over again, one might say that this "one faith" is: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (**10:5**). This sacrifice of Christ is the very heart of the gospel. In the Corinthian epistle, Paul captures the real meaning of the "one faith," when he pens:

> God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:19-21**).

This verse (**19**) gives the central part of the gospel—reconciliation with God through Jesus. The KJV renders **verse 19**: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The word *impute* means to put down to someone's account. God, says Paul, has taken the sins of men and women and has imputed them to Christ. God has punished the sins of humanity in Him: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (**5:21**). Christ bore the punishment that every individual deserves. Peter reports the sacrifice of Christ this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (**1 Peter 2:24**).

But God did not stop with imputing the sins of mankind to Jesus, but He also imputed (credited) to every person who puts his/her trust in Jesus for salvation His righteousness to that person's account. One can say with great joy: "our

unrighteousness was put on Him, but, on the other hand, His righteousness was put on us." Paul elaborates on this kind of righteousness in his discussion of Abraham. He says, "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; [25]Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (**Romans 4:24-24**, KJV). Paul also cites the words of David, who wrote approximately 1000 years after Abraham, concerning imputation:

> What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? [2]For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. [3]For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. [4]Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. [5]But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. [6]Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, [7]*Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. [8]Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (**4:1-8, KJV**).

God's method of salvation under the Old Testament was by imputation. In **Ephesians**, Paul is concerned about the essential principle of unity based upon God's actions in Christ Jesus. Salvation is God's action; it is all of grace; it is all God's doing from first to last. There is only one way of salvation—the way of faith. One can break this unity of faith by bringing in his/her own works. One can break this unity of faith by insisting that all believers submit to one's own sectarian party. When one breaks this unity, one denies the centrality of the "one Lord," namely, Jesus. The "one faith" is not a creedal statement that represents some brand of orthodoxy that distinguishes one Church of Christ from another Church of Christ. The "one faith" is either Jesus or else Jesus is the object of personal belief. As I bring this essay to a close, perhaps Paul's words to Timothy in his first and second epistles would be appropriate to conclude this paper:

> [8] Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. [9] They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience (**1 Timothy 3:8-9**).

> [14] Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, [15] if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. [16] Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (**3:14-16**).

> [8] Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, [9] for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. [10] Therefore I endure

everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**).

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[1] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 271.

[2] Robert B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 211.

[3] Each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ sets forth its own "compendium of theology" that one must adhere to in order for one to be recognized as a faithful child of God. Each faction maintains that its understanding of Christian dogma is the "one faith" in **Ephesians 4:5**. This misunderstanding has opened the floodgates for division on every street corner.

[4] This section does not cover Paul's third missionary journey. This author suggest that you read the entire Book of Acts for yourself and give special attention to all of the sermons reported by Luke. This reading should give you a feel for subjective faith and objective faith. One implies the other; one cannot, in its strictest sense, divorce one from the other. Even though one may lay emphasis on one without mentioning the other, still one must never forget that ultimately the two belong together.

[5] This phrase "obedience to the faith" is interpreted by various scholars as the "content of faith" (objective), but, on the other hand, some scholars assume that "obedience to the faith" is dealing with ethical behavior. One cannot deny that there must be obedience to the faith in that sense. But, the question is, is that the meaning attached to the phrase by Paul? See John Murray *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 13, for faith as an act of obedience, or commitment to the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1980), 15, takes the phrase to be equivalent to the message of salvation. He says,

> The obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation (Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 89f.). The missionary situation has given both noun and verb their predominant meaning, and the characteristic linking of faith and obedience in Paul has a meaning which is not primarily ethical but, as is especially clear in 2 Cor. 10:4-6, eschatological: When the revelation of Christ is accepted, the rebellious world submits again to its Lord. This understanding of faith corresponds to the apostle's Kyrious Christology.

[6] Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 107.

[7] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 199.

[8] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 41-43. He has some excellent comments, but, at the same time, the phrase, so it seems, in light of its context, still bears the ear mark of submission to the message of the gospel.

[9] Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans*, reprinted 1971 (Marshalltown, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, original date not given), 30-31.

[10] *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

[11] H. C. G. Moule *Ephesian Studies* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, 1938), 178.

[12] Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 96.

[13] See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 186.

[14] Ibid., 187.

[15] This concept will be dealt with more fully under an analysis of "faith" in Ephesians.

[16] It is not uncommon for individuals within the Churches of Christ to deny that they have a written creed. On the surface this sounds excellent; but this is not true. The various party journals advance a certain doctrinal stance, and then this becomes in essence the written creed for that particular faction. To disagree with the editor bishops of the various party journals is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself.

[17] Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 96. Wuest may be correct in his analysis, but the whole context of the passage does not seem to bear out the conclusions of many godly scholars. If one would read the entire Book of Ephesians, one discovers that Paul, prior to his statement in chapter 4 and verse 5, develops the scheme of God's redemptive history in Jesus Christ. Everything centers on Jesus as the One who unites fragmented humanity. He is our peace who has broken down the middle wall of partition.

[18] Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 10 (October 1965): 149.

Ibid., 148.

[20] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 313.

[21] Ibid.

[22] T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, nd, latest impression 1991), 109.

[23] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 289.

[24] The definite article is often confusing in trying to arrive at the significance or its emphasis. The following note on the definite article in First Timothy 3:9 by Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdman's Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 273, is worthwhile reading:

> 9. but persons who hold the *mystery of the faith*. This marks one of fifteen uses of *pistis* in the PE with the article (versus eighteen anarthrous uses). Just as the appearance of the article does not designate the faith in terms of content in the PE, so the absence thereof does not signal simply the personal act of believing. The use (or nonuse) of the article has less to do with systematic theological distinctions than with the grammatical and rhetorical patterns of Hellenistic Greek.

[25] Richard B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians* in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 217.

[26] Garland Elkins, "The Silence of the Scriptures," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no., 1 (October 1973): 19-20.

[27] Ibid., 19.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 20.

[30]Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16*), 108. I am indebted to Lloyd-Jones for his exposition of this phrase.

[31] Leroy Garrett, "The Nature of Faith," *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 303.

[32] Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no., 1 (October 1980): 19, 21.

[33] Ibid., 21.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Carl Ketcherside, “The One Faith,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 148.

[36] Leroy Garrett, “The Nature of Faith,” *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 305.

[37] Alexander Campbell, “To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV,” *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835):111-112.

[38] Carl Ketcherside, “The One Faith,” Mission *Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 152.

The True Dimension of Love in the Christian Life

Thrust Statement: **Love is the glue that holds God's people together.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:15-19**

A casual reading of this Ephesian Epistle reveals an emphasis upon love as the glue or cement that maintains unity in spite of diversity of opinions. For Paul, love is the ingredient that allows individuals to bear with one another, especially in the face of differences of judgments. In order to illustrate the principles set forth in Ephesians about love, this paper focuses upon one important unit of Scripture and calls attention to another Scripture dealing with unity, apart from Ephesians, in which love is put forward as the key element that upholds unity, notwithstanding the diversity of beliefs within the body of Christ.[1] The first analysis of unity in diversity is found in **1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1**, and the second study of harmony in diversity is located in **Romans 14—15** (discussed in another essay).[2] The major focus of this paper will center on an examination of **1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1** in order to concretize the meaning of love, even though this essay is Chapter 13 in the series on Ephesians. These two larger sections of Scripture concretize the application of love within the church of Jesus Christ as set forth in the **Book of Ephesians**. The word *love*[3] plays a major role within this short Epistle. This study is a needed study, especially within the Christian church today as it seeks a solution to the divisions that exist within the fractured and fragmented body of Christ.

In **Ephesians 1:15-19**, Paul breaks forth in rapturous language with thanksgiving and prayer for the Ephesians' faith in the Lord Jesus and for their love toward God's holy people. From the moment that Paul heard about their faith and love, he did not cease giving thanks to God in his prayers. In this Epistle, Paul utters two prayers about their spiritual growth in the knowledge of God's blessings (**1:15-19** and **3:14-19**). In these two prayers, Paul does not request material things; but rather, his emphasis is upon spiritual perception of God's riches made available in and through

Jesus the Messiah. As one reads and rereads this short Epistle, one observes that three words flow throughout this Book: faith,[4] hope,[5] and love.[6] Two of these words occur in the beginning of this pericope[7] (**1:15-23**) of prayer, and one also observes additional comments about God's power of raising Jesus from the dead (**1:20**). All three of these words occur within this first chapter.

After learning of their faith and love, Paul writes: "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (**1:16**).[8] Their faith and love motivated Paul to pray for these believers. How do you rate in your faith toward God and your love for God's consecrated people? Could it be said of your local fellowship of believers that the congregation is known for its faith and love and hope? For Paul, both faith and love should characterize every believer. Without loyalty to God and without love to His people, one cannot be a true church. It is not uncommon for Christians to disengage other Christians with ostracism—Christians who not bend to the party creed.

It is not uncommon for some Christians to withhold fellowship from other Christians when they exercise their critical faculties in trying to arrive at a clearer understanding of God's Word. Many believers do not love other Christians who disagree with their understanding of God's Word.[9] For many believers, engagement with other disciples of Jesus hinges upon conformity to the status quo of a particular party creed. One should question the great confidence of absolutism on the part of the various groups within the Churches of Christ as well as other fellowships. Just a casual reading of the religious journals by many sincere Christians reveal the temporary nature of the formulations made by men—formulations conditioned by their social culture and their psychological reactions to it as beyond dispute. For some, dogmatic certainty on every point of doctrine is the only thing that will meet their needs. Many Christians are seeking a finished creed—a creed that is as unalterable as the law of the Medes and Persians.

This author (Dallas Burdette) grew up in a segment of the Stone/Campbell Movement in which the church wanted a finished, or static, creed.[10] What I discovered very early in my struggle for liberation from theological dogmatism was ostracism. This particular fellowship made uniformity of doctrine the basis of unity and also the basis of a true church. It was not uncommon for church signs to read: "The True Church Meets Here." Under no conditions did this odd fellowship allow for doctrinal reinterpretation of long-held traditions. I became, at least to this group, a religious outlaw, that is to say, the Jesse James of the theological world within the one-cup and nonSunday school movement. The bitter intolerance against me was unbelievable. There was an explosion of ill will from this very narrow-minded fellowship known as the one cup and nonSunday school movement.[11]

In the field of controversy, one frequently discovers that courtesy, kindness, fairness, tolerance, and love are conspicuously absent in the face of disagreements, which is totally at variance with **First Corinthians 13**. Letters were written against my supposedly liberal views. Fagots (sticks) were gathered, as it were, and thrown on the flame of hate. The hostilities grew increasingly vehement. I soon discovered that our doctrines were frozen in terms that denied liberty of interpretation. In my now fifty years of ministry, I have learned that opinions may be mistaken, but love never is.

When Christians truly love one another, there is complete and unreserved commitment to each other.

When Christians do not love those who hold another opinion, this behavior of unbending orthodoxy destroys the faith of many. Christians can come nearer winning the lost to Christ if they see unity among His followers. It is in this regard that Jesus prays: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (**John 17:21**, KJV). I am currently dealing with an individual who has rejected Christianity because of what he has seen in the one-cup movement toward those who disagree with the powers-that-be. It is in this same vein that J. H. Oldham wrote (1937) the following note expressing the internal turmoil in his own soul to Paul Tillich about his own doubts:

> You know, Tillich, Christianity has no meaning for me whatsoever apart from the Church, but I sometimes feel as though the Church as it actually exists is the source of all my doubts and difficulties.[12]

In my own search for understanding, I was confronted with a stiff denominational system of ecclesiastical control by powerful preachers. I was excommunicated because the congregation that I labored with accepted a Christian (M. S. Whitehead) from a congregation that employed individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper without making a so-called public confession of sin. I was, in effect, a man without a church. I am writing this essay to call attention to the true dimension of love within the Christian community, a love that God demands of His people. The body of Christ puts accent on community. The ekklesia is the association that unites person with person. The thrust of the essay is to set forth the true dimension of love in spite of differences among God's "chosen people." Love is the answer to so many problems that plague the Christian community today. The words of the apostle John are to the point:

> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son[a] into the world that we might live through him. [10] This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for[b] our sins. [11] Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (**1 John 4:7-12**).

This church that Paul addresses in the Ephesian Epistle is the identical church that Jesus addresses in one of His letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. For instance, Jesus, in having John to write to Ephesus, complains about their lack of love in Ephesus:

> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be

> apostles but are not, and have found them false. [3] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. [4] Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love (**Revelation 2:2-4**).

What happened to this church? How did they forsake their first love? Did they still have zeal for the things of God? This "first love" does not appear to be a lack of zeal—"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" (**2:3**). It was not a lack of belief in Jesus as the Son of God or loose moral behavior, but something else that the Ephesians were missing in their relationship to one another. Apparently, their "first love' is associated with their attitude toward those who disagreed. Were they guilty of heresy hunting? Has the modern-day church left its first love? One does not have to search very much to encounter heresy hunters in the various churches. It is true that one must defend the faith (the Gospel and ethical behavior) once for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**), but, at the same time, one can be too scrupulous concerning so many details that one forgets what Christianity is all about—redemption of the lost in and through Jesus.[13] This salvation can only be received through faith in Jesus as the savior of the world (**Ephesians 2:8**).

As a whole, one can say that the points that divide most Christians are not the teachings dealing with faith in Jesus as Lord and His demands for ethical behavior. The teachings, as a whole, that divide Christians today were wholly unknown in the first century. The subject of heresy hunting centers on a so-called worship service with five prescribed rituals, at least this is so within many of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. Just a casual look at some of the journals put out by the various factions within the Churches of Christ reveal the mindset of heresy hunting. Why is this essay calling attention to this problem that plagues God's people? The current situation in many churches violates the prayer of Jesus for unity among His people. William Barclay, in his commentary on Revelation, has an excellent analysis of this theory of "first love":

> Much more likely this means that the first fine rapture of love for the brotherhood is gone. In the first days the members of the Church at Ephesus had really loved each other; dissension had never reared its head; the heart was ready to kindle and the hand was ready to help. But something had gone wrong. It may well be that heresy-hunting had killed love, and orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of fellowship. When that happens, orthodoxy has cost too much. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love.[14]

In the reading of **Revelation 2:4**, it is very difficult for Christians to unpack the biblical witness to analyze his or her own tradition(s). Individuals read and hear the written Revelation of God, but, at the same time, they do not hear. Even Jesus, following His positive and negative comments about the church in Ephesus, said: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (**2:7**). What does it really mean to say that one has left his or her "first love." All too frequently, one's commitment to the authority of God's Word is too often one's commitment to the authority of the interpreter. This idea of orthodoxy about peripheral matters was not uncommon in the early church, which is still prevalent today. The spirit of intolerance

existed then as well as now. Paul, for example, in his Epistles to Corinth and Rome had to deal with toleration for differences within the fellowship of the saints.

Just a casual reading of First Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians should cause the so-called patternist to step back and reexamine their hostile positions toward those who deny that God has ordained a pattern for a so-called "worship service." If the Christian church is to become a living force in society, it must break the moulds of tradition to which it has become so confined. One's interpretation of Scripture is often the echo of one's own voice. Many Christians do not see the consequences of their own sectarian actions against other Christians. As Christians face the diversity of opinions within the fellowship of the redeemed, one must ever keep in mind the necessity of patience as one tackles conflict among sincere believers. In fact, it is in the Ephesian Epistle that Paul embarks upon this problem of diversity and unity with bluntness:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**Ephesians 4:1-6**).

Between the writing of **Ephesians** and the **Book of Revelation**, one observes a departure from the love that Paul expresses in Ephesians. This Ephesian Epistle was written from Rome about AD 60, while Paul was in prison. On the other hand, the **Book of Revelation** was written no later than AD 68. Within just a short period of time, the church had left its first love, which, sadly to say, is also true nowadays with many churches. Christians must learn to tolerate one another in love. God's people should make every effort to keep the unity created by the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:3**). God is not pleased with believers when they fail to remember that they are to receive one another in the same way that the Lord Jesus receives His people—warts and all (**See Romans 15:7; Colossians 3:12-14**). Everyone has imperfection in his or her life; everyone has flaws in his or her knowledge. Paul calls attention to the seven ones[15] in the **Book of Ephesians** in order to reinforce the motivating factor concerning the need to maintain unity by "bearing with one another in love" (**Ephesians 4:2**).

Since God is love, Christians are to emulate God in loving others. Paul begins this great Epistle by calling attention to God's love in reaching out to humanity even before the creation of the world (**1:4**). In this same chapter, he commends the Ephesians for their faith and their love for all the saints (**1:15**). Once again, Paul attributes one's new life in Christ to God's great love and mercy (**2:4**). Paul prays that this "administration of God's grace" will take root and will bring about established love (**3:17**). Then he prays that they will come to understand "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (**3:18**). This love of Christ, according to Paul, "surpasses knowledge" (**3:19**). Paul wants the Ephesians to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. How can this unity be maintained? The answer is love.

Listen to Paul once more as he calls forth love as the glue or cement that can bind believers, in spite of diversity: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient,

bearing with one another in love" (**4:2**). One cannot read this Epistle without a consciousness of love flooding this letter. Again he writes: "speaking the truth in love" (**4:15**). As the Ephesians shared the truth about the coming of the Messiah spoken of by Isaiah, for example, one should do this in love, even in the face of opposition (**4:15**). As the body of Christ seeks to understand more fully the "administration of God's grace," the body of Christ is to grow and build "itself up in love" (**4:16**).

In his exhortation to live as children of light, he instructs them to "live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (**5:2**). This love is to also be exhibited in the family: "Husbands, love your wives" (5:25). Paul develops his arguments about the husbands love and says again, "In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies" (**5:28**). For the third time in the pericope about "Wives and Husbands," he again tells the husbands to "love his wife" (**5:33**). And, finally, in the conclusion of his letter, he again drives home the point about love: "Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24] Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love" (**5:23-24**). The fruit of love is found and concretized in the following examples from Paul's letters to Corinth and Rome. In these two Epistles, one sees the true dimension of love as set forth in Ephesians.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1: AN EXAMPLE OF TOLERATION

For one to properly understand love and unity, one must look at the entire New Testament range of evidence. Even though this essay cannot explore the entire range of evidence about love in the New Testament, it does focus on **1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1**. In order to develop the theme of love and unity with greater clarity, it is helpful to look at the problems that Paul encountered in Corinth and Rome. How did Paul handle the problems that were about to cause divisions within these two congregations? First, in Paul's letter to Corinth, he encouraged the believers to follow his example of love—a love that resulted in toleration: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (**1 Corinthians 11:1**).

This verse is frequently employed in such a way that it nullifies the meaning (intent) of Paul. As a young preacher, I made use of this Scripture to justify my separation from other Christians who did not see eye-to-eye with me on the use of one-cup in the Lord's Supper, Sunday school, instrumental music, and so on. This misuse of **1 Corinthians 11:1** is still alive on planet earth. In fact, I just received an email (September 3, 2003) about this verse from a former member of this segment of God's people. This individual wanted to know if one could substitute the word *commandments* for the word example, which is what many within this movement still do. The word *commandments* is generally identified with the concept of worship as consisting of five rituals performed in a so-called worship service on Sunday mornings.

At one time, in my early ministry with the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, I interpreted "example" as one-cup and non-Sunday school, and so on. But is this what Paul meant by "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"? The answer is, No! Regrettably, some Christians still substitute the word *commandments* for the word *example*. As stated above, some Christians identify

"commandments" with the so-called five acts of worship associated with a so-called worship service on Sunday morning. Such a deduction inhibits an honest critical testing of context in order to try to arrive at a correct interpretation of how Paul utilized the word *example*.

The traditional approach—the word *command* for *example*—allows for a methodological line of attack that forces tradition into its own little box. On the other hand, an inductive approach is more faithful to the text. When one approaches the Scriptures deductively, this "allows for a tidier package, but only by stuffing all the loose ends into its box."[16] Once more, Johnson correctly writes: "To begin, a deduction inhibits an honest critical testing of the data. Instead of listening openly to the words of Scripture, a norm is set up concerning their meaning, and then the evidence is made to conform to it."[17]

The traditional interpretation of **1 Corinthians 11:1** is frequently argued—sincerely—from within one's own doctrinal tradition, not context.[18] God's Word must not be approached as proofs or arguments in favor of some theological position, such as stated above. One should never espouse opinions and statements unrelated to the meaning of the context. This text (**11:1**) is an excellent example of "love" and "faith" in the **Ephesian Epistle** and the **Book of Revelation**. As one approaches the context of **First Corinthians 11:1**, one quickly discovers that this isolated Scripture is simply the climax of Paul's plea for toleration that began in **chapter 8**. The larger unit consists of **8:1—11:1**. In this larger section, one witnesses Paul's example of apostolic freedom and social responsibility within the Christian community (**9:1-23**) and the examples of Paul and Israel in which he stresses the necessity of self-control (**9:24—10:13**). And, finally, Paul puts the accent on the believer's freedom and his practice of give-and-take (**10:14—11:1**).

Two Controversial Issues

In this larger unit (**8:1-13** and **10:14—11:1**), Paul discusses two issues: (1) the eating of meat sacrificed in a pagan temple and sacrificial meat on sale in the market place, and (2) eating meat at a table in an idol's temple. These were questions that Paul dealt with in this larger section of Scripture. As one examines **8:1, 4** and **8:10**, one observes that in verses one and four, Paul deals with the eating of meats sacrificed to idols, but, on the other hand, verse ten calls attention to the eating of meats at the table in the temple. The following chart should assist one in grasping these two problems:

1 Corinthians 8:1, 4	**1 Corinthians 8: 10**
Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at	For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

all in the world and that there is no God but one.	

In **1 Corinthians 8**, one observes the "knowing ones" and the "unknowing ones." Paul begins with a statement about knowledge: "We know that we all possess knowledge" (**8:1b**), but Paul makes another astounding statement: "Knowledge puffs up" (**8:1c**). It is true that certain individuals possessed correct knowledge as to the eating of meats, but, at the same time, some, so it seems, allowed their correct understanding to puff them up and to haul-over-the-coals the ignorant Christians in this matter of eating meats sacrificed in the idol's temple and then sold in the market place.

Even though some were right and some were wrong concerning the eating of meats sold in the market place, Paul zeros in on the glue or cement that could bridge the differences in order to maintain unity within the body of Christ. One word stands out—the word *love*. Paul expresses the importance of love this way: "love builds up" (**8:1d**). Paul nips-in-the-bud the know-it-all attitude by saying: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (**8:2**). In other words, every individual is in the same boat; no one has perfect knowledge. Truth is absolute, but our knowledge of absolute truth is relative.

How does God react to those who love Him but do not have perfect knowledge? Paul explains by saying: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (**8:3**). This statement is one of the most profound statements in the entire Bible. God looks at the heart. Even though a man or a woman's knowledge may be defective in certain areas, God still wants to know whether this individual loves Him. If so, Paul says that the "man who loves God is known by God." Christians must exercise caution in their relationships with other believers. In spite of imperfection in understanding, one does not want to castigate one whom God loves. After Paul develops his own behavior in relationship to others whose knowledge is defective, he writes:

> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. [11] When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. [12] Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (**1 Corinthians 13:8-13**).

To return to **1 Corinthians 8**, Paul deals with another assertion: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (**8:4**). In other words, one who is a monotheist (believer in one God) does not accept the reality of idols. In **verses 5-6**, Paul gives his statement concerning belief in one God:

> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

In spite of the belief of some recently converted to Christianity, Christians confess one God and one Lord. As stated earlier, some were right and some were wrong. How should Christians react toward those whose knowledge is defective? Paul, once more, goes to the very heart of unity in diversity: "But not everyone knows this" (**8:7**). Paul continues by saying:

> Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do (**8:7-8**).

The eating of food sacrificed to an idol and sold in the market place is not sinful in and of itself. Paul could say, "We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do." What kind of example should the Corinthians exhibit toward those whose knowledge was faulty in this regard? Paul sets forth a pattern that every Christian should exemplify in his or her own reaction to other believers: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (**8:9**). Paul will develop this characteristic in his own life in reference to others. It is this kind of attitude that Paul encourages in **1 Corinthians 11:1**: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Paul also makes the same argument to the Romans when he discusses the effects of one's behavior toward other Christians:

> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. [14] As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food[b] is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean [15] If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died (**Romans 14:13-15**).

The attitude expressed in **Romans 14:13-15** is a reflection of Paul's words in **1 Corinthian 8:1d**: "love builds up." In the first part of **1 Corinthians 8**, Paul draws attention to the eating of meats sacrificed in the temple and sold in the market place, but, in **8:10**, he discusses another issue—going to the idol's temple and eating food at their table. Paul forbids this kind of behavior (**10:14-23**). To participate in their festivities would be tantamount to participation in idolatry. In **10:14—11:1**, Paul deals with the same two problems in **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**. In **10:14—11:1**, Paul focuses on these two topics in **chapter eight** in reverse order. In **10:14-22**, he treats the matter of eating at table in the idol's temple, but in **10:23—11:1**, he discusses the eating of sacrificial meats sold in the market place.

Paul's Example: Apostolic Freedom and Social Responsibility

As examined above, Paul uses himself as an example of freedom, but, at the same time, his social responsibility to the church is paramount in his actions. In one's interpretation of **1 Corinthians 9:1-23**, one must be cognizant that **9:1-23** is within the larger unit of **8:1—11:1**. In this section (**9:1-23),** Paul demonstrates his example of foregoing financial support in order that he might not hinder the spread of the Gospel. Paul goes right to the kernel of the matter about rights when he says: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord (**9:1**)? Paul submits four questions that sets the stage to encourage the foregoing of what one might have the right to do in order to win others to Christ. Paul sets forth the kind of example that he wanted the saints to adhere to. Even though he had the right to financial support, he foregoes it for the sake of the church in Corinth.

Did Paul have the right to expect monetary support for his evangelistic endeavors? In **9:7-12**, Paul develops his arguments to prove that he had a right to count on compensated assistance. In **verse seven**, Paul give three analogies—soldier, farmer, and shepherd—to prove that one who works in the spiritual kingdom has a right to expect financial support for his or her labor. Paul even cites **Deuteronomy 25:4**. He writes:

> Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? [9] For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."[b] Is it about oxen that God is concerned? [10] Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. [11] If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you (**9:8-11**)?

This refusal to accept pecuniary backing is a classic example of **1 Corinthians 11:1**. In **9:12b**, Paul writes: "we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." The second unit of **chapter 9** is found in **verses 13-23**. Once more, he uses the form of a rhetorical question in order to establish his entitlement to economic funds, even though he has not exercised this prerogative. Paul enumerates more evidence to give validity to his arguments that one does have the right of support for preaching the gospel. He calls attention to those who work in the temple and those who minister at the altar (**9:13**) to garner support for his right to support. But, he did not stop with the temple and altar; he called forth the words of Jesus: "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (**9:14**). In spite of this evidence in favor of monetary support, he refused this right (**9:12, 15**). He gives his reason for not accepting money in this particular situation:

> [19] Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law

(though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. [23] I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (**9:19-23**).

In this section of Scripture, Paul sets forth his apostolic freedom and slavery to those he wished to win to Christ. Christians need to emulate this kind of example in their relationships with other believers. This attitude of social responsibility is what Paul refers to when he writes: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (**11:1**). To apply **11:1** to one cup, non-Sunday school, accapella music, kitchens in church buildings, women cutting their hair, women wearing scarves on their head when they pray, and so on, is to totally miss the intent of **11:1**.

Paul's Example: Necessity of Self-Control

Paul uses a second example for unity—self-control. In this next scenario (**9:24—10:13**), Paul uses the examples of a runner, a boxer, and a wrestler to remind the Corinthians that they must not be over confident in their walk with God (**9:24-27**). Then, in **10: 1-13**, he uses Israel as an example of losing their status before God for their ungodly behavior. Even though one may enter a contest, that does not, in and of itself, guarantee the prize. Paul goes right to the heart of the matter of self-control in one's behavior, when he writes:

Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (**9:26-27**).

Paul's example of his own personal life of social responsibility toward others is a characteristic that Paul wanted all Christians to imitate. Paul utterly refused to use his freedom in order to put a stop to someone being destroyed spiritually. It is in this regard that Paul issues his warning:

For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall (**8:10-13**).

Yet, there is another aspect to consider concerning this admonition about obtaining the prize. To fully grasp this short pericope (**9:24-27**), one should also focus on **10:1-13**. Apparently, Paul is warning the Corinthians about going to the idol's temple and participating in their feast, which he addressed earlier in **8:10**. Thus, Paul issues a warning about eating at the table in an idol's temple (**9:24—10:13**). He immediately uses Israel as an example in warning them about being over confident of their standing before God. In the **first six verses of chapter ten**, Paul calls attention to

the spiritual blessings of Israel with a warning. In **10:1-2**, Paul enumerates these blessings: (1) our forefathers were all under the cloud, (2) all passed through the sea, (3) all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (4) all ate the same spiritual food, and (5) all drank the spiritual drink. This section (**9:24—10:6**) is a warning to the Corinthians that they were not to engage in idolatry by going to the idol's temple. The Corinthians were to follow Paul's example in not going to the idol's temple to participate at the altar of demons.

The second unit (**10:7-11**) in the larger pericope (**9:24—10:13**) contains four negatives, followed by a warning (**10:11**). In the first section (**10:1-6**), as noted above, one observes five clauses with a warning, but, in this section, Paul zeros in on four negative statements to reinforce his warning about idolatry. He cautions them not to engage in idolatry as some of the Israelites did (**10:7**); he warned them not to indulge in sexual immorality as some did (**10:8**); he counseled them not to test the Lord as many of the Israelites did (**10:9**), and, finally, he forewarned them about grumbling (**10:10**).

Paul draws conclusions about the Lord's Supper and Idol's Feast. For one to go to the idol's temple was to engage in idolatry (**10:14**). One cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons at the same time. When one drinks the cup of the Lord, one participates in the blood of Christ. When one eats of the bread, one participates in the body of Christ. On the other hand, the sacrifices of those in pagan temples are offered to demons, not to God (**10:20**). This kind of action (going to the idol's temple) is strictly forbidden. Just for one to participate in the Lord's Supper is not a guarantee of spiritual security; one must forsake idolatry and sexual immorality. Israel is a classic example of those who experienced many spiritual blessings but were destroyed. A Christian must not give offence to his fellow believer or to God. Every Christian must shun the worship of idols (**10:14**).

In conclusion to Paul's arguments, he discusses the believer's freedom in Christ (**10:23—11:1**). Apparently, Paul cites their feelings: "Everything is permissible" (**10:23**). Yet, Paul argues, "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (**10:24**). As one glances back over the larger section (**8:1—11:1**), one discovers that the first issue dealt with eating food sacrificed to idols (**8:4-7; 10:23—11:1**). Some, so it seems, argued that it was all right to eat meat sacrificed to idols since idols are not gods. As a result of this mindset, some were saying, "Everything is permissible." One should never exercise his freedom when others are hurt by one's actions (**8:7**). Paul reminds the Corinthians that a Christian is always concerned about others (**10:24, 33**). Paul writes:

> So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [32] Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (**10:31—11:1**).

For Paul, Christians should never engage in any activity that might endanger their own spiritual lives. He hammered home the point that "Christian freedom is

freedom for others and for Christ."[19] **First Corinthians 13** is the climax of what started off in **1 Corinthians 8**. If one wishes to understand "love," one must read **Chapter 13**. One can hardly read Chapter 13 without a consciousness that love breaks out—goes far beyond—the circle of enumerated heroic achievements. In the first three verses of this Chapter, Paul describes man. All of these gracious acts are vain if one does not have love. Pay attention to Paul as he as he leaves all human values and ascends to the summit of love:

> If I speak in the tongues[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

If one possesses the gift of prophecy, if one can fathom all mysteries, if one holds all knowledge, and if one has a faith that could remove mountains, but does not have love, it is all for nothing, according to Paul. In this chapter Paul stresses that there is an end to the gifts of grace (**vv 8-11**), but all of these graces shatter in the presence of love if they do not become one with it, the greatest gift of all is love. It is very difficult for some Christians to pass from *then* to *now* in their application of Paul's climax to what he had begun in **Chapter 8**.

This inability to pass from the then to *now* is especially true today in the very stiff denominational system of ecclesiastical control exercised by many believers within the Churches of Christ, especially the dictatorial interpretation of preachers and elders. Within many Christian fellowships, one discovers that their doctrine is a doctrine that is frozen in time—a doctrine with denies the liberty of interpretation. As a result of this mindset, love is thrown out the window. This sectarian spirit can be described as "conscientious factionalism,"[20] that is to say, they are not conscious of their factionalism. This denominational narrowness throws out love. If one does not speak their language and understand their thoughts, one receives the axe. In former times, one went to the stake. Many Christians still made uniformity of doctrine the basis of a church and the basis of love. How does Paul speak of love in the face of differences within the community of Christ? In **verses 4-7**, Paul paints a very vivid picture of love:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

In these four verses, Paul sets forth the very essence of love. The style and rhythm of these sentences are more that marks of external form or just writing style; he joins one sentence to another with emphasis upon love. One quickly discovers that love does not place itself beyond the tender conscious of the weak. In **8:1—13:13**, Paul calls attention to the behavior of some who sought to elevate their knowledge to the point of destroying the one who did not have perfect understanding. This kind of

behavior was the very opposite of the teachings of Jesus. One should not cut himself or herself off from the weaker brother or sister in Christ on the basis of knowledge.

For Paul, love is "not self-seeking." Love does not seek it own way and bitterness remains far from love. In **verses 8-13**, one discovers that the permanence of love is the miracle that can be measured in the face of the passing of all the other gifts of grace. In **1 Corinthians 8:2**, Paul shows that love toward God—not knowledge—is the basis of one being-known-by-God. In this entire section (**8:1—13:13**), Paul sought to ward off the enthusiasm for redemption based on knowledge rather than the message of the Cross. Is it any wonder that Paul begins this Epistle with these words: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**2:2**). In **chapter 13**, Paul develops a definition of love that is unknown in the ancient world. Günther Bornkamm points out with Justice:

> There is no reason to make this chapter into a great sentimentality, if one takes seriously the unflinching antithesis in what it says. . . . Because it is a reality so living, concrete and variedly effective in detail, as it is described in 4—7, and at the same time it is the all-embracing power of God, put into force in the midst of this world as the love of God in Jesus Christ: "The love of Christ holds us bound," controls us (II Cor. 5:14). . . . From this love and in this love the church has its life.[21]

CONCLUSION

What is the true dimension of love in your relationship with other believers? In love one sees the permanent presence of salvation as the bond of perfection: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (**Colossians 3:14**), says Paul. Love in **1 Corinthians 13** is not the self-perfection of man, but rather is the outcome of the redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (**John 15:12**). It is in this same vein that Paul issues his exhortation for unity in spite of differences: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**). Again, Paul writes to the Colossians:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [13] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [14] And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (**Colossians 3:14-15**).

Is love and unity prerequisite to winning individuals to Christ? How can Christians praise God and win the world? It is through love and unity. Why have I written so much on the true dimension of love? It is simply that I want the world to know and believe that God sent Jesus as the savior of the world. In Jesus' final hours, he prays to the Father about this unity:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe

that you have sent me. [22] I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: [23] I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (**John 17:20-23**).

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[1] This diversity is not associated with teachings that undermined the very foundations of Christianity, namely, the deity of Jesus and ethical behavior that glorifies God (see 2 John 9; Galatians 5:16-26). Many Christians maintain that unity can be maintained only in conformity to their brand of orthodoxy, especially associated with rules and regulations surrounding a so-called worship service with five prescribed rituals that must be performed in a prescribed manner.

[2] For a detailed study of Romans 14—15, see Dallas Burdette, "Watch Out for Those Who Cause Division (Romans 16:17)" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 12 September 2003] located under caption Misapplied/Twisted Scriptures.

[3] The word *love* occurs 232 times in the New Testament (NIV).

[4] The word *faith* occurs eight times in Ephesians: 1:5; 2:18; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; 6:16, 23.

[5] The word *hope* occurs four times in Ephesians: 1:12, 18; 2:12; 4:4.

[6] The word *love* occurs sixteen times in Ephesians: 1:4, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 18, 19; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23, 24 (2x).

[7] A pericope is a designated portion or unit of Scripture; it may be long or short. A pericope is a self-contained literary unit or section.

[8]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[9] First Corinthians 8 through chapter 14 is a classic example of differences covered by love. Paul sets forth, in this section, love as the realm of God's grace. It is love that makes the church into a new creation. For Paul, love is the new *aeon* within which the church sees Christ Himself in the congregation as the great exemplar of love. Love is the element that holds Christians together in spite of differences. Love is the all-embracing power of God, which love has been put into force in this world through the love of God in and through Jesus Christ. From this love of God and of Christ, the church has its life. Thus, the church too must manifest the love of God toward sinners and toward brothers and sisters in Christ, in spite of diversity in understanding.

[10] This section is a short autobiographical statement about my own earlier spiritual journey in the one cup and nonSunday school movement. The actions taken against me were taken out of a desire to be true to the "faith" once for all delivered to

the saints. There was not a consciousable intend to violate God's Word in their reaction to my disagreement with the status quo. Every Christian, to some extent, brings a certain amount of baggage with himself or herself as each seeks to understand God's Word.

[11] This attitude is not unique among this particular fellowship—a fellowship made up of many good and sincere Christians. I have suffered abuse from other Churches of Christ as well, which are just as dogmatic and radical as the one-cup fellowship. Yet, there are many within this one-cup movement that do not adhere to stringent condemnation of other fellowships. One cannot and must not lump everyone within the one-cup fellowship within the same mold. Even those that are extremely radical are possibly "unconscious sectarian." In other words, they are not conscious that they are causing divisions. This essay is not to condemn those who disagree with this writer, but rather, to lead them to a clearer application of God's Word in order to bring about unity and love among all God's people.

[12] J. H. Oldham, *Life is Commitment* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), 79.

a Or *his only begotten Son*

b Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away*

[13] Unfortunately, many Christian fellowships identify their particular brand of orthodoxy as the faith once delivered to the saints.

[14]*William Barclay, The Revelation of John*, Volume 1, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster, 1976), 64.

[15] One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God (**Ephesians 4:4-6**).

[16] Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 38.

[17] Ibid.

[18] For a detailed study of "context" and the basic principles of how to interpret the Word of God, see Dallas Burdette, "First Timothy 2:9-15: Literalism and Isolationism of Scripture" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 8 September 2003] located under caption Sermons and Essays and then under subheading Women: Their Role in the Church.

a Or ``*We all possess knowledge," as you say*

b Or *that nothing*

b Deut. 25:4

[19] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Revised Edition (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 81. I recommend this book for everyone's reading.

a Or *languages*

b Some early manuscripts *body that I may boast*

[20] A phrase coined by Bob Lewis.

[21] Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 188.

Two Spheres: Human and Divine

Thrust Statement: **God wants every person to choose the divine rather than the human.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:1-3**

As one reads the Book of Ephesians, one cannot help but wonder about the reaction of those who received this book about the unfolding of God's plan of salvation for humanity—a salvation planned before the beginning of creation (**Ephesians 1:4**). What does this book mean to you? Does the word *saint* capture your attention? What does the expression "faithful in Christ Jesus" mean to you? Have you picked up on the various phrases concerning one's relationship to Christ? What does "in Christ," "in Him," "in Christ Jesus," and "through Christ Jesus" convey to you? How many times does the word *faith* occur in this short epistle? How many times does the word *saints* occur in this epistle? What does the "riches of God's grace" express to you (**1:7**)?

If one is to fully grasp the significance of this book, one should reflect upon the above questions and seek to examine the significance of the words that Paul utilizes as he seeks to capture the grandeur of God's grace. One cannot read the Book of Ephesians without a consciousness of two spheres—the human and the divine. In this book, Paul paints a picture of both sides of the coin. Every Christian operates in two spheres—the earthly and the spiritual, that is to say, the visible and the invisible. A consciousness of the spiritual gives power to deal with the carnal. An awareness of God's grace promotes good behavior within every one who has been consecrated to the service of God. Even thought every believer lives in this world, nevertheless his or her citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**).

COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS 1:1-3

> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: [2] Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [3] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.[1]

Paul: The Author (1:1)

The author identifies himself as "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." The Greek name of Paul is Παυ'λö (Paulos, "small or little"), but his Hebrew name is lWav* (v*aWl), which is translated into Greek as Σαυ'λö (Saulos) and into English as Saul (**Acts 9:1**). Since Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin (**Philippians 3:5**), one can assume that he was named after the first king of Israel (**1 Samuel 9**). Prior to Paul's call to discipleship, Luke gives information that indicates that Paul (Saul) was a part of an antichristian movement in Jerusalem (**Acts 9:1-2**). After Paul's first missionary journey, he wrote to the churches he had established in the province of Galatia concerning his fight against Christians (AD 48). He writes: "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. [14] I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers (**Galatians 1:13-14**).

As a devoted rabbi, Paul unleashed his hatred for the people of the Way. Paul's zeal for the traditions of his forefathers was so strong that he went to the high priest to obtain letters to the synagogues of Damascus to carry out his covert operation of persecution. (**Acts 9:1-2**). While on his way to wreak havoc among God's people (saints, αΣγιψοï Jagiois, "set apart ones"), the Lord Jesus appeared to him on his way to Damascus to arrest men and women who professed faith in Christ (**9:3-19**). As a result of this encounter with the risen Lord, Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles. Luke gives the following account: "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. [16] I will show him how much he must suffer for my name'" (**9:15-16**).

Later, we find Paul in Antioch ministering to the Lord. The New International Version (NIV) gives the following account that led to the three missionary journeys of Paul:

> In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. [2] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." [3] So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (**Acts 13:1-3**).

The words *worshiping the Lord* is translated from the Greek words λειτουργουψντων τω' κυριψω leitourgountwn tw kuriw, which is best translated as "ministering to the Lord." At first glance, one might consider the phraseology—worshiping the Lord—as depicting a so-called worship service as is generally practiced within the Christian community. But this "worshiping the Lord" was simply the activities carried out by individuals who were proclaiming the Good News of God's Way of salvation. As far as the record in Luke is concerned, Paul conducted three missionary journeys. According to Luke, Paul stayed in Ephesus for at least two years (**Acts 19:10**) and preached Jesus as the Way (**19:9**).

Several years later, after this work of two years in Ephesus, Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus (AD 60) from his prison confinement in Rome. He spoke of this incarceration three times in this brief epistle:

> For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles (**Ephesians 3:1**).
> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (**4:1**).
>
> Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (**6:19-20**).

Even though Paul faced death, he never forgot his mission—an obligation to preach Jesus and to teach them the Word of the Lord and to build up the Ephesians in the faith. Paul expresses it this way:

> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. [14] Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming (**4:11-14**).

Paul wanted to share with them the great truths that he taught throughout his ministry. In closing this epistle, he writes out of his deep love for their welfare:

> [21] Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. [22] I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. [23] Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24] Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love (**6:21-24**).

As stated above, this letter was written from Rome. During this period of incarceration, Paul wrote four letters—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In the Ephesian epistle, Paul sets forth the very essence of God's Good News by unfolding what had been hidden in ages past (**3:9**). Paul speaks of that which had been kept hidden in the past as the "mystery of his will" (**1:9**). If one wishes to understand the "mystery of God" that Paul develops in Ephesians, one should approach this book with the intent of understanding God's plan of salvation (Jesus Christ) that God had decreed even before He spoke this universe into existence (**1:4**). Paul employs several synonymous expressions to call attention to the wonder of it all—"mystery of his will" (**1:9**), "administration of God's grace" (**3:2**), "mystery of Christ" (**3:4**), "administration of this mystery" (**3:9**). Just a casual reading reveals that Christ is this mystery (see also **Colossians 1:25-27**). In fact, in the Colossian letter, Paul goes right to the heart of what the "mystery of his will" was all about:

> Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. [25] I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—[26] the mystery that has

been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (**Colossians 1:24-29**).

The Assembly in Ephesus: Saints (1:1b)

After Paul's introduction of himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he addresses the believers as "saints." Today, the use of the word *saint* carries the idea of perfection—one that is far above others in morality. But Paul did not employ the word *saint* in this sense, even though it also represents the moral purity to which a person is called (**1:4**). In fact, every believer is a "saint" in the sense that he or she has been set apart for God. The primary meaning of the word *saint* has reference to dedication of service, that is, a people set apart for the Lord. This concept is the very reason that Christians are described as "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (**2:21**). Again, the word *saint* is from the Greek word ἁγιö Jagios, which means "set apart" by God, that is, "consecrated" for service in His kingdom. When one puts his or her trust in Christ, God takes this person and transfers him or her into the body of Christ (**Colossians 1:13-14**). As a result of this transaction, every Christian's body becomes a part of the temple of God. Not only do Christians experience this transaction, but they also have the Holy Spirit taking up His dwelling in them—each individual person (**Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 3:16**). Since God has set each person apart as a result of his or her trust in Christ, then one ought to live a life that portrays a consecrated life to God (**Ephesians 4:17—5:20; Colossians 3:1-4**).

Listen to Paul as he stresses this point in his letter to Corinth: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). In spite of living in a decadent society, such as Ephesus, they were still saints while going about their daily activities—sailing, fishing, tent making, selling goods, shop keeping, building, raising children, and so on. They were "saints" because they were "in Christ." Whenever one reflects upon this word *saint*, one can only celebrate the miracle of God's grace. It is in this vein that Paul shouts, as it were, the following words:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

The Assembly in Ephesus: Faithful (1:1b)

Faithful: Faith in Christ

In **verse 1 of chapter 1**, Paul speaks of "the saints in Ephesus" and "the faithful in Christ Jesus." The word *faithful* (πιψστö pistos, "faithful" or "believer") is not easy to translate.[2] Some scholars translate this word (faithful) as an adjective and

others as a noun. Having said this, it appears, at least to me, that the "faithful" are those who have exercised faith in the Gospel and have allowed the Gospel to reshape their behavior. Have you allowed the Gospel to reshape your behavior? The essence of faith centers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian is full of faith. Are you full of faith? Every Christian believes that Jesus is the One He claimed to be—the Son of God. He or she believes that Jesus is the only one who came from the Father and that Jesus is the One who became flesh and made His dwelling among us (**John 1:14**). He or she believes that Jesus was born of a virgin (**Matthew 1:22-23**). Also, every saint believes that Jesus came into this world in order that "he might taste death for every man" (**Hebrews 2:9**). Every child of God is always conscious that "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (**1 Peter 3:18**). Lloyd Jones says that the word *faithful* means, "to be full of faith, to exercise faith."[3] One cannot be a Christian and not believe certain things.

Faithful: Ethical Behavior

A Christian is not just one who is good morally, but rather, one who has put his or her trust in Jesus as the Savior of the World. One cannot separate one's Christian faith from one's Christian life. This famous epistle contains not only doctrine, but it also contains duty. For one to be faithful in the true sense of the term, one must put into practice Paul's admonition toward the latter part of this epistle (**Ephesians 4:17—5:20**). Christians are to live lives worthy of their calling (**4:1-3**). God has created a new humanity; this new humanity consists of those who have responded to God's grace. This new humanity and this new creation is the work of God (**2:10**). Since every child of God is a "saint," then every Christian must have a new set of loyalties and a new set of agendas. God's "saints" belong to a different kingdom—a spiritual kingdom devoted to proclaiming Jesus as God's Way of reconciling the world unto Himself (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). One is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone. One is saved by grace through faith (**Ephesians 2:8**). Paul develops this grace by unraveling the "mystery" (μυστηψριον musthvrion, "secret") of God in **1:3-14**. An unfolding of this mystery should result in one putting his or her trust in Christ. Whenever one responds to God's grace, one ought to live a life that portrays a consecrated life to God.

Grace and Peace (1:2)

As stated above, God has created a new humanity; this new humanity consists of those who have responded to God's grace. Since every child of God is a "saint," then every Christian must refocus his or her devotion and develop a new to-do list to bring honor to God. God's "saints" belong to a different kingdom—a spiritual kingdom devoted to proclaiming Jesus as God's Way of reconciling the world unto Himself. One is saved by faith alone, but one should remember that the faith that saves is not alone. One is saved by grace through faith. Paul develops God's way of salvation by unfolding the mystery of God in **1:3-14.** The words *grace* and *peace* overshadow this short epistle. Paul begins this epistle by saying: "Grace (χαψρϊ caris) and peace (ειϛρηψνη eirhnh) to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**1:2**).

Grace

Grace represents God's saving initiative. God took the initiative to reconcile sinful humanity unto Himself in His new community. One can witness the awe of Paul as he sought to write to the Ephesians about this matchless love of God: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, [5] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (**2:5**). Paul cannot stop with just this statement; he continues with penetrating words about the Gospel of peace: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (**2:6-7**). Paul cannot stop expressing his consciousness of God's rich grace. Again, he writes: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast" (**2:8-9**). The word *grace* appears eleven times in this epistle.[4]

Peace

This Gospel of grace is a Gospel of peace. Paul employs the word *peace* (ειρηψνη eirhnh) eight times in Ephesians.[5] He begins with the word *peace* (**1:2**) and concludes with the word *peace* (**6:24**). In chapter six, he also refers to the Gospel as the "Gospel of peace" (**6:15**). Paul, as he begins to unravel the "mystery" of God's will, makes a bold statement about Jesus: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (**2:14-15a**). But he does not stop with this startling statement, he continues by saying: "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (**2:15b-16**). How did God make peace with sinful humanity? Paul says that God did this through "the cross" of Jesus. The following chart illustrates Paul's emphasis upon grace and peace as he began and ended this epistle:

Ephesians 1:2	Ephesians 6:23-24
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.	Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24] Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

As one reads this epistle, one quickly observes that Paul does not use these words lightly and loosely and thoughtlessly. It is not just a mere formula. These two words convey the endless riches showered upon humanity "in and through Jesus." This second verse in chapter one (see chart above) is an overview of the entire epistle. In the words of Lloyd Jones: "Grace is the beginning of our faith; peace is the end of our faith. Grace is the fountain, the spring, the source."[6] As one reflects upon these two words, one can grasp something of God's love as it is played out in the cross of Jesus. In grace, one witnesses God's condescending love. In Grace, one witnesses God coming down to redeem sinful humanity. Yes, it is in grace that one witnesses God stooping down to reconcile men and women unto Himself.

Peace is the ultimate goal of the cross of Jesus. This peace is not the absence of troubles in the lives of God's people (**John 15:27; Philippians 3:7**). This peace is a

peace that brings together two parties that are separated from one another. The cross of Jesus not only brought peace between God and humanity, but it also brought about peace between Jew and Gentile: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (**2:14**). When one desires grace and peace from God, one understands that God has disclosed the truth about his creation. In this short epistle, Paul is telling his readers what they need—grace and peace. Without acceptance of God's grace and peace "in and through Jesus," one is separated from God. Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture a life without God "in and through Jesus":

> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— [12] remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (**2:11-13**).

In Christ Jesus (1:1b)

Are you "in Christ Jesus" or are you outside Christ? According to Holy Scripture, men and women find themselves in a miserable state as a result of sin. Were it not for God's grace, one would find himself or herself without hope and without God in the world. Throughout Scripture, GRACE is the answer to man's dilemma. It is only through grace that one can find peace with God. Grace from God is unmerited and undeserved; it is a condescending love. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul introduces the Gospel of God with grace. Grace introduces the entire Gospel. This is what the Gospel is all about. Do you want peace with God? If so, one can only find this peace "in and through Jesus." At the cross of Jesus, grace and peace kissed each other. This message of Ephesians began with emphasis upon two spheres—human and divine. Paul writes with glowing words about the divine: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms (εϛν τοὶ εϛπουρανιψοὶ en tois epouraniois) with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (**1:3**). God is the source of our spiritual blessings.

In Christ (1:3)

As one peruses the Book of Ephesians, one quickly discovers that Christ is the very heart and core of this magnificent book. These spiritual blessings are found only "in Christ." The phrase "in Christ" occurs **fourteen times** in Ephesians.[7] In this epistle, Paul calls attention to the place of spiritual blessings—"in Christ." To illustrate where salvation occurs, Paul also utilizes the phrase "in Christ Jesus" **eight times**.[8] Again, Paul emphasizes the sphere of salvation with another phrase, "in Him." This phrase occurs **nine times** in eight verses.[9] Paul uses another phrase to also capture the place of spiritual blessings that are bestowed upon individuals—"through Christ Jesus." This phrase appears only **once** in this epistle.[10] All of these expressions are synonymous terms to describe the spiritual position of every believer. Every Christian is identified with Christ. Since every believer is in Christ, he or she is able to draw on the wealth of Christ for his or her own daily living.

Christ/Messiah (1:1)

Since Christ is the "mystery" of God in the Book of Ephesians, one discovers that the title "Christ" floods the magnificent book. The title Christ (Χριστοψ Cristos, "Anointed One" = the Hebrew word j^yv!m* m*v!,^j appears forty-nine times in the Book of Ephesians. This title occurs twelve times in the first chapter.[11] The name Jesus (Ιςησου Ihsous = the Hebrew word u^Wvy} y@vWu^) appears twenty times in this book. Just in the first chapter alone, the name Jesus appears seven times.[12] Christians are in Christ. It is "in" and "through" Jesus Christ that the new community of God has come into being (**2:14-22**). The title Christ dominates Paul's mind as he writes this book. It is "in Him" (εςν ω/ en Jw, "in whom" {KJV]) that God has chosen us even before He created the world (**1:4**). It is "in Him" (en Jw) that God has redeemed us through His blood (**1:7**). It is "in Him" (en Jw) that every believer is marked with a seal—the promised Holy Spirit (**1:13**). It is "through" (διαψ dia) Jesus Christ that God adopts children of wrath as His sons and daughters (**1:5**). It is "in Him" (en Jw) that God effects predestination and election (**1:11**). It is "in the one he loves" that forgiveness of sins is received (**1:6**).

CONCLUSION

No one out of Him will be saved. This preposition "in" (εςν en) is one of the most important words in the New Testament. What does it really mean to be saved? It simply means to be "in Christ" (εςν Χριστω en Cristw) One can hardly reflect upon the propositional phrase, "in Christ," without recalling the words of Jesus to His disciples: "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (**John 15:4**). Every believer is in Christ and Christ is in the believer. Can I explain this? No! In order for one to bear fruit, one must be in Him. The "mystery" of God revolves around this great truth—salvation is in Him (εςν αυςτω en autw).

Do you want to experience God's grace and peace? If so, you can only take advantage of these two blessings "in" and "through" Christ. He is our peace. He is the mystery that Paul develops in the Book of Ephesians. Jesus is God's Way of salvation. It is only "in Him" that one can receive the forgiveness of sins. It is only in Him that one can receive adoption into God's family. Which sphere are you in? Are you in Christ or are you out of Christ? Are your thoughts focused on the human or on the divine? Are you laying up treasures on earth or are you laying up treasures in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-21**)? Are you trying to serve God and Satan at the same time (**6:24**)? Where is your delight (**Psalm 1:2**)? Is it in God or worldly things (**Joshua 24:15**)? Are you concerned about Christ, the hope of glory (**Philippians 3:7-11; Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-3**)?

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 70, footnote 11.

[3] Lloyd Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 29.

[4] Ephesians 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7; 6:24.

[5]Ephesians 1:2; 2:14, 15, 17 (2 times); 4:3; 6:15; 6:23.

[6] Lloyd Jones, *An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23*, 36.

[7] 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32 (NIV).

[8] 1:1; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21 (NIV).

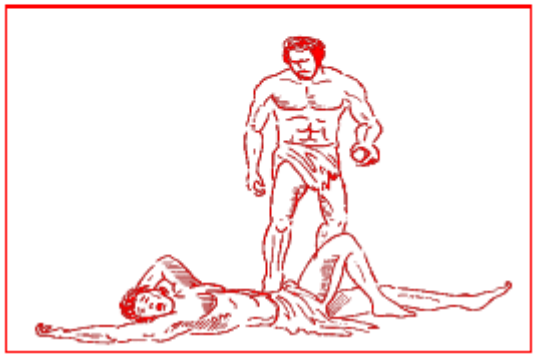
[9] 1:4, 7, 11, 13; 2:21, 22; 3:12 (two times); 4:21 (NIV).

[10] 1:5.

[11] 1:1 (2 times), 2, 3 (2 times), 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 20.

[12] 1:1 (2 times), 2, 3, 5, 15, 17.

Unfruitful Works of Darkness



Thrust Statement: **The unfruitful works of darkness is associated with every kind of impurity.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 5:11**

Ephesians 5:11 is cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their separation from other Christians who refuse to be traditional to the whims of a select few who hold to certain doctrines that are considered essential to salvation. The KJV employs the expression "unfruitful works of darkness" and exhorts the saints not to have "fellowship with." On the surface, this Scripture, in isolation from its context, appears to give validity to the actions of certain individuals. Almost every division within the known twenty-five or more distinctive religious bodies within the Stone/Campbell Movement cite this passage in order to give some soundness to their transactions of chastisement (withdrawal). The "unfruitful works of darkness," depending on which fellowship one is associated with, generally are associated with instrumental accompaniment in singing, solos, quartet singing, handclapping in the assembly, handraising in the assembly, Sunday school, individual cups, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the church treasury, Bible colleges, and so on. In other words, if someone violates what one considers to be one of the so-called five acts (rituals) of worship on Sunday morning, then one must not have "fellowship with."

When one begins with a faulty perception of the context, one finds his/her own expectations. What an author meant is the only true interpretation to any Scripture. In other words, the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. One must reject the traditional interpretation, not because it is private, but rather because it is wrong. If one fails to consider context, this failure leads to an interpretation of its own, which is totally cut off from its author.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul develops the "one faith" that is mentioned in **4:5**. In chapter 2, he calls attention to their prior state of utter degradation

(**2:1-3**). These individuals had followed the "ways of the world" (**2:3**, NIV). In chapter 4, he exhorts the Ephesians to "live a life worthy of the calling you received" (**4:1**). They were taught "to put off your old self" and "to be made new in the attitude of your minds" (4:22, 23). Since Christians are created "to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (**4:25**), believers should cast off "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (**4:31**). In this same chapter, he warns Christians about "unwholesome talk" (**4:29**). Once more, he calls attention to "sexual immorality" (**5:3**). Paul stresses the point that there should not even be "a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (**5:3**).

Yet, it appears that some thought that purity of life really did not matter (**5:6**). "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them" (**5:6-7**). Earlier, he says, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (**5:5**). Having given these instructions about right behavior, he then says, "Your were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and untruth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret" (**5:8-12**). The "fruitless deeds of darkness" (NIV) is the same as the "unfruitful works of darkness" (KJV). Christians are to have no participation ("fellowship") in these acts of darkness, "but rather expose them" (**5:11**).

Agree with One Another

Thrust Statement: **God's people are to promote the unity of the Spirit.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 1:10**

Paul writes: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (**1:10**, NIV). Even though the Bible is the final source of authority, nevertheless, it still needs to be interpreted. To cite a Scripture out of context in order to uphold a particular bias is intellectual dishonesty, even though one's misapplication may not be intentional. The way Paul seeks to help his readers understand the meaning he wishes to convey is through context.

In order for one to understand the meaning of the phrases employed by Paul—"agree with one another" and "be perfectly united in mind and thought"—one must understand the text as a whole, not a passage in isolation from its context. It is not uncommon for the subjective religious culture of the interpreter to determine the meaning of a given passage. In other words, one's own prior frame of reference often determines his/her own interpretation. Just a casual reading of First Corinthians reveals that the traditional interpretation attached to this verse is not in keeping with the tenor of this Epistle.

Paul had received information about rival factions within the Christian community at Corinth (**1:10-17**). In order to bring about a cessation of hostilities, Paul appeals to Christ as the Wisdom and Power of God (**1:18—2:5**). In fact, the first ten verses of this Epistle employ the name "Jesus Christ" nine times and "Christ" one time. The Corinthians were quarreling because they were aligning themselves with various leaders within the body of Christ (**1:12**). He then develops his arguments that since Christ is not divided, then how can His people be divided into warring factions (**1:13**). The focus of the Christian proclamation of Christ's crucifixion must remain paramount in settling the disputes among these believers (**1:18—2:5**). It is the message of Christ's crucifixion, not even baptism, that is the unifying factor within the Christian community (**1:13-17**).

As one reads the entire context, one quickly observes that Paul is not requesting unanimity of opinion on understanding the Word of God. Within the kingdom of God there will always be different interpretations of God's written Revelation (see **chapters 8**, **12-13**). These chapters preclude what might be called Christian "cloning," which is the traditional interpretation fostered by many sincere believers in order to enforce conformity on other individuals. The focus is upon Christ rather than human leaders (**1:10—6:20**). Not even baptism—important as it is—can be elevated to the position of salvation in and through Christ (**1:13-17**).

Often times, one can arrive at a correct interpretation by considering what **1:10** cannot mean. The traditional interpretation contradicts **8:1-13**. Within the congregation, one discovers that some were correct and some were wrong in their theology. How did Paul deal with this? Did he cite what he had said earlier in **1:10**—"agree with one another"? No! Rather, he said that it is true that "we all possess knowledge" (**8:1**). What happens when one thinks he is in possession of a true understanding? Listen to Paul once more: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (**8:1**). Paul was conscious that Christians could no more think alike on every subject than they could all look alike. He realized that even though all truth is truth, yet not all truth is essential to salvation. He also realized that all error is error, but, at the same time, he knew that not all error would damn one's soul. Is truth absolute? Yes! But one's knowledge of absolute truth is not absolute, but relative. He says this: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (**8:2**). How does God react to imperfection in one's knowledge? Is God going to send someone to Hell simply because he/she fails to comprehend some truth? Paul gives God's answer to man's dilemma: "But the man who loves God is known by God (**8:3**).

Christ:
The Gospel of Redemption

Thrust Statement: **Christ is the Gospel of God.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 1:4, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4**

What is the Gospel of God? Is the Gospel of God twenty-seven books called the New Testament? Is the Gospel of God about accapella singing versus singing with instrumental music? Is the Gospel of God about kitchens in the church building? Is the Gospel of God about one cup (container) on the Lord's Table versus individual cups? Is the Gospel about the manner of breaking the bread in the observance of the Communion—break or pinch? Is the Gospel of God about a so-called worship service with five prescribed rituals that have to be performed in a prescribed manner?

Today, many Christians identify their particular brand of orthodoxy as the Gospel of God. When some Christians refuse to acquiesce to some odd interpretation of Scriptures as espoused by certain fragmented groups, the ones who decline to receive the promoted interpretation are frequently labeled as preaching another gospel. Unfortunately, many Christians associated with the so-called American Restoration movement (Stone/Campbell Movement) do not understand God's Gospel. Out of this unity movement designed to unify Christians in all the sects came three major divisions—Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and Disciples of Christ.

Today, there are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ alone. **Galatians 1:6-9** is called forth to give credence to one's tenacity in holding steadfastly to one's inherited traditions, traditions mistakenly identified with the Gospel. Those who cite these verses to maintain their traditional view of the Gospel fail to read Paul's definition of the Gospel in **1:4**. In fact, the entire Book of Galatians is a treatise that unfolds the true nature of the Gospel of God. One can say in essence that the Gospel of God is about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Gospel is about: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (**Acts 4:12**).[1] Again, one can define the Gospel with the words of Paul to the Corinthians: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has

committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). In short, one can say that the Gospel of God is Christ Himself. The primary objective of this essay is to analyze the heart of God's Gospel, not to castigate or condemn those who have not yet reached a true understanding of God's grace in and through Jesus.

When one reflects upon the words of the angel to Joseph concerning the pregnancy of Mary, one is confronted with the beginning of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the One promised to redeem humanity from God's wrath and judgment for transgression(s) of His Laws—"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[a] because he will save his people from their sins" (**Matthew 1:21**). One is about to witness the unique act of God in human history; that is to say, God becomes flesh (**John 1:14**). The Incarnation reveals that He who is not of history became history through the virgin birth. Paul captures this same concept to the Galatians as he seeks to unfold the Gospel of God: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). One cannot reflect upon the Gospel of Redemption without a consciousness of the Cross. If one inquires as to what the Gospel of Redemption is, one must say, "It is the Cross."

The Gospel is Good News; it is about how God tasted death for everyone. He reigns, as it were, from the deadly tree. The Cross is central in the preaching of the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. Again, one can say that the Gospel is Jesus. In the Book of Galatians, Paul calls attention to the preaching of the Gospel to Abraham (2166 BC). The Gospel was proclaimed to Abraham over two thousand years before the virgin birth of Christ. After calling attention to this historical announcement to Abraham, Paul focuses upon the very heart of the Gospel proclaimed: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"[a] meaning one person, who is Christ" (**Galatians 3:16**). Earlier in this same book, Paul begins his short Epistle with his definition of the Gospel: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age" (**1:4**). If one preaches the Gospel, one preaches Jesus. Paul states this truth as he seeks to unfold the truth of the Gospel:

> But when God, who set me apart from birth[a] and called me by his grace, was pleased [16] to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus (**1:15-17**).

The death of Jesus for the sins of humanity is found throughout the writings of the New Testament books. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, summarizes the heart of the Gospel given to him by Jesus, a Gospel which consists in Christ's death:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [3] For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that

he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**).

The Cross of Jesus is dominant in the writings of Holy Scripture. Just a perusal of Mark's Gospel reveals the importance of the death of Christ. Almost one half of his Gospel is about the death of Christ. The first Christians faced and conquered the pagan world through the scandalous fact of the Cross of Jesus. The message of the Cross was paramount in the preaching of Paul. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he sets forth the centrality of the Cross: " For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). Within the preaching of the Gospel, one is conscious of God's power to transfer one from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (**Colossians 1:13-14**). Is it any wonder that Paul cries out: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**2:2**).

The Cross changed the way of counting time. This change from B.C to A. D. authenticates the Christian belief that the Cross of the Messiah is the supreme reality of human existence. The Cross is the decisive center of preaching Christ. Paul writes to the Christians of Colossae about Christ's death and its implications for redemption: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (**Colossians 1:22**). If the Cross is not the crucial point, how can the human story of Jesus have any significant purpose. The crucifixion of Jesus is the most important event, along with the Resurrection, of human history. In the Cross, one witnesses two events, both poles apart. On one side, one sees the very depths of evil, but, on the other hand, one sees the deeper depth of God's holy love as He condescends to rescue fallen humanity from condemnation. In this act of killing the Son of God, one witnesses the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and, at the same time, the amazing wonder of God's forgiveness. Even in this darkest point of human history, one also sees history's most blinding light—a light that makes one stand in awe and wonder of such love. The Cross of Jesus is God's antidote for the poison of Satan. There has never been anything like this event—God becoming flesh and dying—in the annals of humanity.

It is in the Cross that one observes the real nature and meaning of evil. As one gazes upon the Cross of Christ, one views evil acted out in all its naked blasphemy. This event of Christ's crucifixion was so great that Mark declares, "At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. [34] And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[a] (**Mark 15:33-34**). This picture of God's Son is without parallel in the records of time. What makes this crucifixion greater than all the other crucifixions of the world? Prior to and after Christ, one still reads about thousands who were crucified. Yet, this crucifixion still stands in the annals of history as the most significant fact in all the history of the world. Why? In the crucifixion of Christ, the One who dies is none other than Incarnate Righteousness and Love. Here was One in whose presence individuals felt the presence of God. Even one of the centurions at the crucifixion knew something was different. Mark calls attention to his reaction: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and[b] saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son[c] of God" (**15:39**).

This One who died upon the Tree was more than just a man; He was from above. Jesus' response to the religious leaders sets the tone for His penetrating words about His prior existence: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins (**Mark 8:23-24**). His language is loaded with His concept of His own uniqueness with God. Jesus, at least on one occasion, called attention to His unique language concerning His preexistence: "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. [43] Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say" (**John 8:42-43**). Jesus, in His prayer to the Father, speaks of His oneness with the Father: " I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (**17:11**).

Shortly after this prayer, one witnesses God's atoning and redeeming action in the crucifixion of that Man upon His Cross. This event cannot be described simply as some theological fiction, but rather as a historical fact; that is to say, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). In this atonement, One observes God in Christ transforming the worst of humanity into children of God through Christ's redeeming work upon the Cross. In this dastardly deed perpertrated against God, nevertheless, one sees God making this most heinous crime the occasion of His amazing grace. One stands in awe of such forgiveness. The Cross is not only an act of Pilate, but it is also an act of God. This is the Gospel that has moved the world. This Gospel elicits sheer wonder about forgiveness through faith in His Son.

In the Cross of Jesus, one is conscious of the paradox of the Cross—forgiveness and justice. Can God allow sin to go unpunished? How can God be just and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity? Is forgiveness immoral? Forgiveness cannot be solved by some argumentative theory of philosophy, but by the Cross of Jesus towering, as it were, in triumph over sin. In the Cross of Jesus, one witnesses justice and love in unison; it is also in the Cross that one observes righteousness and grace fused together. One can only explain the blending together of justice and love as well as righteousness and grace through the Cross. Paul deals with sin and grace along with righteousness and love in the Book of Romans. He confronts God's justice and forgiveness face-to-face in his treatment of Jesus as God's atonement as God's justification for His forgiveness:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to

demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

One cannot logically explain how two mutually exclusive elements—justice and forgiveness—can be fused together. Nevertheless, one can see and receive the combining of the two elements as a historical fact in the Cross. Upon Calvary, one sees One who is Goodness and Love personified, which demonstrates God's grace in dealing redemptively with evil in the place it is most concrete, namely, the suffering and death of Jesus. The Cross is not fictitious, but actual. The Cross portrays God's holy love Incarnate, which love sets forth the paradox of God's forgiveness. Just a casual glance at the sayings of Christ reveals how He interpreted His redeeming work in terms of His self-sacrifice upon the altar of Calvary. Luke reports the following words of Jesus about His historic destiny: "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed" (**Luke 12:50**)! Jesus knew that the Cross was His historic destiny. As His ministry upon earth was coming to an end, He took His disciples aside and explained to them what must happen in Jerusalem—His death and resurrection:

> We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death [19] and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life" (**Matthew 20:18-19**)!

As one seeks to unravel this mystery hidden from ages past in God, one is confronted with the mystery of the kingdom of God, that is, Jesus must suffer and die. It is in this paradox of the Cross that God's holiness is made known redemptively in and through the Cross of Jesus. This is the message of salvation. This is the message of redemption. This is the Gospel of Redemption through Christ. In the final hours of His earthly sojourn, one observes Jesus moving from Gethsemane to Calvary. One sees Jesus, not as a passive victim in the drama unfolding, but as an actor throughout this ordeal. Jesus is conscious of this death for the sins of humanity. He Himself lays down His own life. John reports the following words of Jesus about His own death: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (**John 10:17-18**).

In the final hours of Jesus' life, He shows no trace of sentimentality or self-pity for His impending doom upon the Cross. Shortly before eating the Passover with His disciples, one hears the words of Jesus as He reflects upon the world in bondage: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children" (**Luke 23:29**). Even on the Cross, one hears the voice of a conqueror: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**). Jesus knows what He is doing—fulfilling the prophecy of **Isaiah 53**. He is fusing justice and forgiveness together. In this one act of self-sacrifice, one sees mercy and holiness kissing each other. Upon the Tree, He reigns. As one looks at the Cross of Jesus, one observes the Son of God in action for the sins of humanity. He is strong and selfless to the very point where history is torn into two parts—BC and AD. In his final moments, He cries out: "It is finished" (**John 19:30**). This is what God's Gospel is all about.

Upon the Cross, Christ is not a passive victim in this drama of sin and salvation, but rather, He is a voluntary actor throughout this whole ordeal of suffering as a sacrifice for sin.

Upon Calvary, one witnesses the utter desolation of the Son of God. He cries out in anguish: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (**Matthew 27:46**)? As one seeks to comprehend this cry, one cannot help but wonder if this outburst of grief describes the Son of God staggering under the fact and burden of sin as only the sinless Son of God could do? Is Jesus saying "amen" on behalf of sinful humanity to God's righteous judgment upon sin in all its hideousness and rebelliousness against the throne of God? Only He who could realize the full extent of the desolation and enmity against God could make such a cry—" My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Did Jesus make this cry in order to prevent sinful men and women from having to cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In this explosion of heartache, one hears the awful cry of abandonment from the Cross to remind sinful humanity of that moment in which He was utterly alone. The Cross depicts the lowest point of naked blasphemy against God and His Good News of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. Yet, in spite of this rejection of His Son, Paul, as he writes to the Philippians, grabs pen and paper, as it were, to sum up the very essence of God's love and Christ's activity in this drama of redemption for lost humanity:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**Philippians 2:1-11**).

CONCLUSION

In the Cross of Christ, law and love are brought together. The Cross of Jesus is the only way in which the absolute holiness of God and the absolute mercy of God are seen. Christ is God's Atonement for the sins of humanity. The biblical doctrine of atonement cannot be understood without the ideas of God's absolute holiness, God's divine wrath, and God's divine righteousness. In God, one observes the divine will to forgive as well as the divine will to punish because of His absolute holiness. All three—holiness, wrath, righteousness—are found in the Cross of Jesus. Unless one

takes the reality of God's wrath seriously, one cannot take his or her guilt seriously. God's wrath responds to one's guilt and sin. God's answer to the dilemma of men and women can only be found in God's Gospel. It is on the Cross that Jesus tasted the full sense of remoteness from God as He bore the sins of humanity: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God has revealed Himself in Jesus. The full revelation of God's Gospel is seen in the life, birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the Cross of Jesus, one observes an actual objective transaction. In other words, God does something that is absolutely necessary for the redemption of humanity. This is what the Gospel of God is about. The Cross, for the believer, is the sign of faith; it is the sign of God's community; and it is the sign of the revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ. The Gospel of God is a movement from God to men and women. The one who believes in these divine acts—the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus—receives salvation. It is only at the Cross that one sees fully what separates one from God. In the Cross, God's mercy transcends all human standards. Jesus Christ, in His person, is in actuality the central point and focus of God's Gospel. The Gospel of God is about the self-offering of God for the sins of humanity—this is God's Gospel. It is God who takes the burden upon Himself. The Gospel is about the self-movement of God toward men and women for their redemption. If one rejects God's Atonement, one remains severed from the God of love. In conclusion, Paul's words to the Romans sets forth the wonder of God's Gospel:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" [b] (**Romans 1:16-17**).

[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

a *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua,* which means *the LORD saves.*

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

a Or *from my mother's womb*

a Or *you at the first*

a Psalm 22:1

b Some manuscripts do not have *heard his cry and.*

c Or *a son*

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

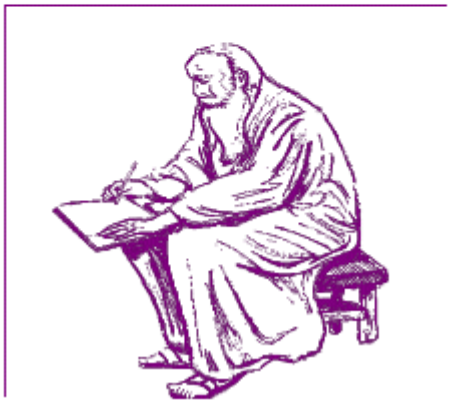
a Or *in the form of*

b Or *the form*

a Or *is from faith to faith*

b Hab. 2:4

Knowledge Puffs Up



Thrust Statement: **God does not want one to use his knowledge as a club to beat to death those who do not yet understand things very clearly.**

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:1—15:7

Christians frequently encounter opposition from other believers when they fail to understand the odd interpretation of some distinctive fellowship of believers. Salvation, to some extent, is based upon one's discernment of Holy Scripture, especially with details concerning a so-called worship service. Many years ago, this author was thrown out of the one-cup and non-Sunday School movement over his failure to adhere to the interpretations placed upon Scriptures frequently cited to maintain faithfulness to the party. If one deviated from the norm, then salvation, so it was thought, could not belong to the one whose knowledge did not measure up. Within this fellowship, one had to cross every "t" and dot every "i" according to the political party leaders in order to enjoy fellowship among the so-called chosen of God. This group, as a whole, did not make allowances for differences within the circle. Salvation was established upon correct knowledge of the Scriptures, not the finished work of Christ.

But this kind of attitude is not unique to just one particular assembly of God's people; it is true with almost every faction within the Churches of Christ. Each rupture within the Stone/Campbell Movement stresses correct knowledge before the right hand of fellowship can be extended. In other words, absolute perfection in knowledge is made a condition of salvation. Salvation is contingent upon absolute freedom from error. As one reflects upon the implications of such a philosophy concerning precision in knowledge, one is confronted with a number of questions that everyone must answer for himself/herself. For example, does Scripture advance this notion of perfection in knowledge? Can individuals be in fellowship even when one's information is deficient.

Is absolute freedom from error a condition of salvation? Is complete rightness in knowledge a prerequisite for salvation? These are difficulties that every believer must investigate for himself/herself. Does the Word of God deal with this problem of exactness in comprehension? Can one be incorrect in his/her information and still be saved?

Every Christian should thank God that He has not made salvation dependent upon flawlessness in one's insight; if He had, none could be saved. In this same vein, one can thank God that He has not made freedom from error a stipulation of salvation; if he had, none could be saved. Christians frequently ask the question: Are you in fellowship with brethren in error? The answer is yes! There is no other kind. Christians are in fellowship with fellows, not error. Many Christians have not learned that salvation is based upon God's grace, not one's work or one's clear insight. One's justification with God begins with faith and ends with faith.

It is not uncommon for Christians to look down upon others whose knowledge has not progressed as much as theirs. If one would go to the Bible without spectacles, one would quickly see that the Scriptures deal with such a scenario. One's failure to grasp clearly the teachings of God does not give one the right to snub a child of God. Paul, for example, discusses this issue of correct and incorrect knowledge in his first letter to Corinthians and in his letter to Romans.

In the Corinthian letter, Paul castigates the so-called knowing ones. Some of the believers were accurate in their perception of meat sacrificed to idols and their perception that there is only one God, but, on the other hand, there were some Christians who did not get the picture of these things quite as clearly as others. How did Paul confront this theme of imperfection in discernment? The following is Paul's response to the crisis in Corinth:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. [4] So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled (**1 Corinthians 8:1-7**).[1]

Paul goes right to the heart of the matter: "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know" (**8:2**). There is not a Christian on earth that knows everything, as he/she would like to know. Everyone's knowledge is deficient. Paul says that it is true that "we all possess knowledge" concerning things sacrificed to idols, but one cannot press his/her knowledge to the point of disregard for another brother or sister in Christ. He asserts that knowledge can make one arrogant,

but, on the other hand, love can edify. One of the greatest statements made by Paul in this epistle is, "if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (**8:3**). Paul cuts through all the arguments and underbrush by saying that it is true that not everyone knows everything as he/she ought to know, but, at the same time, he zeros in on the detail that matters most to God—"if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (**8:3**). In spite of an absence of knowledge in this area concerning idols and food, God still loves the one that loves Him. Even though Christians may excommunicate other Christians over their legalistic enactment, nevertheless, God still knows him/her.

As one evaluates this controversy, one wonders if the subject of "one God" is less important than instrumental music, grape juice, bread pinching, Bible colleges, and so on? The one-cup movement, as well as many other divisions within the Churches of Christ, is hopelessly divided over the most trivial issues. Just a perusal of some of the journals published by those associated within the Churches of Christ confirms the factiousness that is prevalent. How did Paul confront this dilemma of insufficiency in knowledge about the one true nature of God and the erring brother or sister? Paul says that it is true that there "is no God but one" (**8:4**). In the development of his arguments, he continues to express, "there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him" (**8:6**). Did all the Corinthians understand this truth? How should individuals respond to this question? One should allow Paul to respond to this question with his penetrating analysis of knowledge and fellowship and toleration. Listen as Paul continues his arguments for toleration: "However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (**8:7**). According to Paul, if the "knowing ones" insist upon their rights to the downfall of the weaker believer, then he affirms that "they sin against Christ: For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (**8:11-12**).

Paul, after setting forth various differences within the community of believers (**chapters 8—12**), concludes his remarks in the thirteenth chapter. Paul takes up five chapters in developing his thoughts on "knowledge" and "love," which gushes forth in toleration. In **chapter 13**, he sums up his arguments that began this discussion of imperfection in knowledge (**8:2**) with this conclusion: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love" (**13:12-13**, NSAB). Carl Ketcherside sought to capture the very essence of Paul's writings when he pointed out that fellowship in Jesus is not contingent upon agreement of opinions:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by

> legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[2]

This citation from Ketcherside is in harmony with the teachings of Paul in the Corinthian and Roman correspondences. Paul, in writing to the Christians at Rome, says, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**Romans 14:2**); "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**14:4**); "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (**14:5**); "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**15:7**).

CONCLUSION

One should do some soul searching at this point in his/her life. Just how does God accept individuals? Does God recognize an individual with imperfection in his/her knowledge or in his/her life? It is in this same manner of God's favorable reception that Paul encourages Christians at Rome to put into practice. Many sincere Christians reject the evidence for toleration in spite of the evidence. If an individual's prejudice is so deep-seated, then, in effect, a verdict is passed before the evidence is even considered, then, surely, prejudice negates the possibility of understanding a text. Some have such a rigid stance on the basis of their own hermeneutics that they have accused others as not respecting the authority of the Bible. This author has not hesitated to reject ancient traditions when the presuppositions are untenably based upon the evidence from Holy Scripture. It goes almost without saying that much theology has been passed on to the church by godly teachers who learned their traditions and interpretations many years earlier. Both Thomas and Alexander Campbell—founders of three distinct religious bodies—sought to eliminate long-held traditions passed on from generation to generation.

One cannot show this point more clearly than by quoting at length from the pen of Thomas Campbell (father of Alexander Campbell). He confronted the enforced attitude of conformity to the status quo in his own day. When he refused to allow an ecclesiastical body to dictate to him what he could or could not believe, he rebelled. As a result of his concept of "unity-in-diversity," he was excommunicated in 1809. Following this encounter with the church authorities, he wrote the Magna Charta known as the *Declaration and Address*—completed on September 8, 1809. In this document, Articles 6 and 7, he wrote:

> 6. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church.

> Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.
>
> 7 That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.[3]

Every Christian must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditions handed down to them through the centuries. The traditions of the church make it difficult, if not impossible, for many sincere believers to read the Bible without spectacles. It is difficult for Christians to hear anew the Word of God. The faith of the founding fathers in the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ has become the watchword for orthodoxy. Their interpretation was passed on as normative to their particular band of believers and became authoritative for that scrupulous schism. Those who refused to submit faced excommunication for departing from the idiosyncrasies advanced in each meticulous splinter throng of so-called "sound" Christians.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[3] Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1985), 110-111.

Paul's Example: Concern for the One with a Weak Conscience

Thrust Statement: **One should never exercise his freedom to the destruction of another.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:1-11**

INTRODUCTION

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). [1] Christians frequently approach this text (**11:1**) without a guidepost. One's interpretation of this passage is frequently dependent upon the guesses of the interpreter, not the context. In the absence of a barometer, or context, one encounters many speculations that vary widely, depending on the belief system of the interpreter. As a result of no concrete gauge, one witnesses disagreements among many godly interpreters of Holy Scripture. When one begins with a faulty conception of the meaning of a passage in question, one is able to find his or her expectations fulfilled. In order for one to interpret the Word of God correctly, one must have a measurement, that is to say, a context, or background. This introduction focuses on the principles of sound biblical interpretation in order to have some ground rules for deciphering the text(s) in keeping with the Spirit's intent. This preliminary work is essential since many Christians just take the instructor's word without an investigation on their own.

Within certain fellowships, one becomes conscious that there is a shared consensus as to the meaning of certain passages, interpretations that have been learned and passed on from generation to generation. One objective of this essay is to explore one of numerous texts that are commonly cited in order to maintain purity within a particular fellowship. This study is an examination of Paul's intent in **1 Corinthians 11:1**, which is the only proper foundation for understanding. The author's meaning is accessible through his language and context. One, sometimes, must reject the

traditional rationalization promoted by certain factions within the body of Christ because the explanation is wrong.

The true meaning is the sense represented by the text itself. When an interpreter deviates from the intended meaning of a word or text, this deviation leads to confusion and to division. One must never cite a Scripture out of context in order to build a particular brand of orthodoxy around the isolated Scripture. When one ruthlessly abandons the author as the determiner of his text's meaning, then every analyst becomes the decisive factor by which the text or particular word is established. Unfortunately, one's commitment to the authority of God's Word is too often one's loyalty to the authority of tradition or the interpreter. One should never forget that the Christian community could be wrong in its interpretation of Scripture. One can identify with Robert Johnston when he says, "A text must be treated within its full unit of meaning." [2]

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1: AN EXAMPLE OF CONCERN

When Christians approach the interpretation of any passage, one must always allow love to be a controlling factor in his or her relationship with the brother or sister who espouses a different perspective. Love makes allowances for imperfection in knowledge. In order for one to extent toleration for differences, there must be love—love is the glue or cement that holds God's people together (**1 Corinthians 13**). For one to properly understand love and unity, one must look at the entire New Testament range of evidence. Even though this essay cannot explore the entire range of evidence about love in the New Testament, it does focus on **1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1** in order to draw conclusions that will lead to greater unity among a people that are divided on every street corner, all in the name of biblical purity.

What does love have to do with **11:1**? Love is the motive behind Paul's emphasis on following his example. For one to fully comprehend the impact of Paul's admonition about following his model, one must explore love as the motivating factor as the drive behind Paul's admonition to follow his pattern in dealing with Christians whose knowledge is not up to par. In order to develop the theme of love and unity with greater clarity, it is helpful to look at the problems that Paul encountered in Corinth and Rome. How did Paul handle the problems that were about to cause divisions within these two congregations? First, in Paul's letter to Corinth, he encouraged the believers to follow his

example of love—a love that resulted in concern for the uninformed: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (**1 Corinthians 11:1**).

This verse is frequently employed in such a way that it nullifies the meaning (intent) of Paul. When Christian interpreters disengage the text from its context, this maneuver leads to disunity among God's people. One must always exercise caution that he or she does not move from "behind" the text to "in front" of the text. This change in venue allows the interpreter to manipulate the text to coincide with his or her own presuppositions. One must permit the intention of the text to govern his or her insight; otherwise, one employs the Bible as a weapon to uphold his or her own traditions. One must never study to be consistent, but rather one must study for truth.

Justo Gonzalez and Catherine Gonzalez remind their readers that one "must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[3]

As a young preacher, I made use of this Scripture to justify my separation from other Christians who did not see eye-to-eye with me on the use of one-cup in the Lord's Supper, Sunday school, instrumental music, and so on. This misuse of **1 Corinthians 11:1** is still alive on planet earth. In fact, I recently received an email (September 3, 2003) about this verse from a former member of this segment of God's people. This individual wanted to know if one could substitute the word *commandments* for the word *example*, which is what many within this movement still do. The word *commandments* is generally identified with the concept of a Sunday morning worship service—a service that revolves around five rituals carried out in a prearranged way—no departure from the established creed is allowed without fear of castigation.

At one time, in my early ministry with the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, I interpreted "example" as one-cup and non-Sunday school, and so on. But is this what Paul meant by "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"? The answer is, No! Regrettably, some Christians still substitute the word *commandments* for the word *example*. As stated above, some Christians identify "commandments" with the so-called five acts of worship associated with a so-called worship service on Sunday morning. Such a deduction inhibits an honest critical testing of context in order to try to arrive at a correct interpretation of how Paul utilized the word *example*. My early traditions made it almost impossible for me to read the Word of God accurately.

This author (Dallas Burdette) employed **11:1** to reinforce his interpretation of the Lord's Supper pericope in **11:17-34**. From this reading, I arrived at the conclusion that Paul enjoined one container in the distribution of the fruit of the vine and one undivided loaf that had to remain in one piece since Christ's body is one. This interpretation also led to a division within the one-cup movement that degenerated into two more camps—bread breakers and bread pinchers. The movement had already divided into the wine only versus the grape juice only fellowships. With the long-established interpretive grid of **11:17-34** among the one-cup community, I automatically associated "follow my example" as dealing with the one-cup in the Lord's Supper. My predetermined interpretive grid limited my interpretation. Without an awareness, or consciousness, this interpretation occurred through a predetermined interpretive filter.[4]

In order for one to avoid his or her own "interpretive filter," one must learn to unpack the biblical text in which a text is found. As a result of one's presuppositions, one often reads into the Scripture his or her own likes or dislikes rather than reading out of Scripture what is actually there. This mindset often tends to confuse the Scriptures with one's own interpretation. From this approach, if someone disagrees with one's perception of Scripture, the one who disagrees is unsound. The time-honored traditional approach—the word *command* for *example*—allows for a methodological line of attack that forces custom into its own little box. On the other hand, an inductive approach is more faithful to the text. When one approaches the Scriptures deductively, this "allows for a tidier package, but only by stuffing all the

loose ends into its box."[5] Once more, Robert Johnson correctly writes: "To begin, a deduction inhibits an honest critical testing of the data. Instead of listening openly to the words of Scripture, a norm is set up concerning their meaning, and then the evidence is made to conform to it."[6]

The established interpretation of **1 Corinthians 11:1** is frequently argued—sincerely—from within one's own doctrinal tradition, not context.[7] God's Word must not be approached as proofs or arguments in favor of some theological position, such as stated above. One should never espouse opinions and statements unrelated to the meaning of the context. This text (**11:1**) is an excellent example of "love" and "faith" in the Ephesian epistle and the Book of Revelation. As one approaches the context of **1 Corinthians 11:1**, one quickly discovers that this isolated Scripture is simply the climax of Paul's plea for toleration of concern that began in **chapter 8**. The larger unit consists of **8:1—11:1**. In this bigger section, one witnesses Paul's example of apostolic freedom and social responsibility within the Christian community (**9:1-23**) and the examples of Paul and Israel in which he stresses the necessity of self-control (**9:24—10:13**) in spite of one's right to participate in an activity that is not condemned by God. And, finally, Paul puts the accent on the believer's freedom and his practice of give-and-take (**10:14—11:1**).

Two Controversial Issues

In this larger unit (**8:1-13** and **10:14—11:1**), Paul discusses two issues: (1) the eating of meat sacrificed in a pagan temple and sacrificial meat on sale in the market place, and (2) eating meat at a table in an idol's temple. These were questions that Paul dealt with in this larger section of Scripture. As one examines **8:1, 4** and **8:10**, one observes that in verses one and four, Paul deals with the eating of meats sacrificed to idols, but, on the other hand, verse ten calls attention to the eating of meats at the table in the temple. The following chart should assist one in grasping these two problems:

1 Corinthians 8:1, 4	**1 Corinthians 8: 10**
Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.	For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

In **1 Corinthians 8**, one observes the "knowing ones" and the "unknowing ones." Paul begins with a statement about knowledge: "We know that we all possess knowledge" (**8:1b**), but Paul makes another astounding statement: "Knowledge puffs

up" (**8:1c**). It is true that certain individuals possessed correct knowledge as to the eating of meats, but, at the same time, some, so it seems, allowed their correct understanding to puff them up and to haul-over-the-coals the ignorant Christians in this matter of eating meats sacrificed in the idol's temple and then sold in the market place.

Even though some were right and some were wrong concerning the eating of meats sold in the market place, Paul zeros in on the glue or cement that could bridge the differences in order to maintain unity within the body of Christ. One word stands out—the word *love*. Paul expresses the importance of love this way: "love builds up" (**8:1d**). Paul nips-in-the-bud the know-it-all attitude by saying: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (**8:2**). In other words, every individual is in the same boat; no one has perfect knowledge. Truth is absolute, but our knowledge of absolute truth is relative.

How does God react to those who love Him but do not have perfect knowledge? Paul explains by saying: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (**8:3**). This statement is one of the most profound statements in the entire Bible. God looks at the heart. Even though a man or a woman's knowledge may be defective in certain areas, God still wants to know whether this individual loves Him. If so, Paul says that the "man who loves God is known by God." Christians must exercise caution in their relationships with other believers. In spite of defect in discernment, one does not want to castigate one whom God loves. After Paul develops his own behavior in relationship to others whose knowledge is defective, he writes:

> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. [11] When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. [12] Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (**1 Corinthians 13:8-13**).

To return to **1 Corinthians 8**, Paul deals with another assertion: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (**8:4**). In other words, one who is a monotheist (believer in one God) does not accept the reality of idols. In **verses 5-6**, Paul gives his statement concerning belief in one God:

> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

In spite of the belief of some recently converted to Christianity, still many Christians, even though they confess one God and one Lord, have reservations about eating meats to idols. Some were not sure about the validity or non-validity of other gods. As stated earlier, some were right and some were wrong. How should Christians

react toward those whose knowledge is defective? Paul, once more, goes to the very heart of unity in diversity: "But not everyone knows this" (**8:7**). Paul continues by saying:

> Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do (**8:7-8**).

The eating of food sacrificed to an idol and sold in the market place is not sinful in and of itself. Paul could say, "We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do." What kind of example should the Corinthians exhibit toward those whose knowledge was faulty in this regard? Paul sets forth a pattern that every Christian should exemplify in his or her own reaction to other believers: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (**8:9**). Paul will develop this characteristic in his own life in reference to others. It is this kind of attitude that Paul encourages in **1 Corinthians 11:1**: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Paul also makes the same argument to the Romans when he discusses the effects of one's behavior toward other Christians:

> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. [14] As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food[b] is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean [15] If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died (**Romans 14:13-15**).

The attitude expressed in **Romans 14:13-15** is a reflection of Paul's words in **1 Corinthian 8:1d**: "love builds up." In the first part of **1 Corinthians 8**, Paul draws attention to the eating of meats sacrificed in the temple and sold in the market place, but, in **8:10**, he discusses another issue—going to the idol's temple and eating food at their table. Paul forbids this kind of behavior (**10:14-23**). To participate in their festivities would be tantamount to participation in idolatry. In **10:14—11:1**, Paul deals with the same two problems in **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**. In **10:14—11:1**, Paul focuses on these two topics in **chapter eight** in reverse order. In **10:14-22**, he treats the matter of eating at table in the idol's temple, but in **10:23—11:1**, he discusses the eating of sacrificial meats sold in the market place.

Paul's Example: Apostolic Freedom and Social Responsibility

As examined above, Paul uses himself as an example of freedom, but, at the same time, his social responsibility to the church is paramount in his actions. In one's interpretation of **1 Corinthians 9:1-23**, one must be cognizant that **9:1-23** is within the larger unit of **8:1—11:1**. In this section (**9:1-23),** Paul demonstrates his example of foregoing financial support in order that he might not hinder the spread of the Gospel. Paul goes right to the kernel of the matter about rights when he says: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord (**9:1**)? Paul submits four questions that set the stage to encourage the

foregoing of what one might have the right to do in order to win others to Christ. Paul sets forth the kind of example that he wanted the saints to adhere to. Even though he had the right to financial support, he foregoes it for the sake of the church in Corinth.

Did Paul have the right to expect monetary support for his evangelistic endeavors? In **9:7-12**, Paul develops his arguments to prove that he had a right to count on compensated assistance. In **verse seven**, Paul give three analogies—soldier, farmer, and shepherd—to prove that one who works in the spiritual kingdom has a right to expect financial support for his or her labor. Paul even cites **Deuteronomy 25:4** to bolster his right to collect economic assistance, even though he declined this privilege. It is in this fashion that he writes with firmness about the legitimacy of financial support:

> Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? [9] For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."[b] Is it about oxen that God is concerned? [10] Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. [11] If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you (**9:8-11**)?

This refusal to accept pecuniary backing is a classic example of **1 Corinthians 11:1**. In **9:12b**, Paul writes: "we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." The second unit of **chapter 9** is found in **verses 13-23**. Once more, he uses the form of a rhetorical question in order to establish his entitlement to economic funds, even though he has not exercised this prerogative. Paul enumerates more evidence to give validity to his arguments that one does have the right of support for preaching the gospel. He calls attention to those who work in the temple and those who minister at the altar (**9:13**) to garner support for his right to support. But, he did not stop with the temple and altar; he called forth the words of Jesus: "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (**9:14**). In spite of this evidence in favor of monetary support, he refused this right (**9:12, 15**). He gives his reason for not accepting money in this particular situation:

> [19] Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. [23] I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (**9:19-23**).

In this section of Scripture, Paul sets forth his apostolic freedom and slavery to those he wished to win to Christ. Christians need to emulate this kind of example in their relationships with other believers. This attitude of social responsibility is what Paul refers to when he writes: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (**11:1**). To apply **11:1** to one cup, non-Sunday school, accapella music, kitchens in church buildings, women cutting their hair, women wearing scarves on their head when they pray, and so on, is to totally miss the intent of **11:1**.

Paul's Example: Necessity of Self-Control

Paul uses a second example for unity—self-control. In this next scenario (**9:24—10:13**), Paul uses the examples of a runner, a boxer, and a wrestler to remind the Corinthians that they must not be over confident in their walk with God (**9:24-27**). Then, in **10: 1-13**, he uses Israel as an example of losing their status before God for their ungodly behavior. Entering a contest does not guarantee winning the prize. Paul goes right to the heart of the matter of self-control in one's behavior, when he writes with vigor to practice self-discipline:

> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (**9:26-27**).

Paul's paradigm of his own personal life of social responsibility toward others is a characteristic that Paul wanted all Christians to imitate. Paul utterly refused to use his freedom in order to put a stop to someone being destroyed spiritually. It is in this regard that Paul issues his warning:

> For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall (**8:10-13**).

Yet, there is another aspect to consider concerning this admonition about obtaining the prize. To fully grasp this short pericope (**9:24-27**), one should also focus on **10:1-13**. Apparently, Paul is warning the Corinthians about going to the idol's temple and participating in their feast, which he addressed earlier in **8:10**. Thus, Paul issues a warning about eating at the table in an idol's temple (**9:24—10:13**). He immediately uses Israel as an illustration in warning them about being over confident of their standing before God. In the **first six verses of chapter ten**, Paul calls attention to the spiritual blessings of Israel with a word of warning. In **10:1-2**, Paul enumerates these blessings: (1) our forefathers were all under the cloud, (2) all passed through the sea, (3) all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (4) all ate the same spiritual food, and (5) all drank the spiritual drink. This section (**9:24—10:6**) is a warning to the Corinthians that they were not to engage in idolatry by going to the idol's temple. The

Corinthians were to follow Paul's example in not going to the idol's temple to participate at the altar of demons.

The second unit (**10:7-11**) in the larger pericope (**9:24—10:13**) contains four negatives, followed by a warning (**10:11**). In the first section (**10:1-6**), as noted above, one observes five clauses with a warning, but, in this section, Paul zeros in on four negative statements to reinforce his warning about idolatry. He cautions them not to engage in idolatry as some of the Israelites did (**10:7**); he warned them not to indulge in sexual immorality as some did (**10:8**); he counseled them not to test the Lord as many of the Israelites did (**10:9**), and, finally, he forewarned them about grumbling (**10:10**).

Paul draws conclusions about the Lord's Supper and Idol's Feast. For one to go to the idol's temple was to engage in idolatry (**10:14**). One cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons at the same time. When one drinks the cup of the Lord, one participates in the blood of Christ. When one eats of the bread, one participates in the body of Christ. On the other hand, the sacrifices of those in pagan temples are offered to demons, not to God (**10:20**). This kind of action (going to the idol's temple) is strictly forbidden. Just for one to participate in the Lord's Supper is not a guarantee of spiritual security; one must forsake idolatry and sexual immorality. Israel is a classic example of those who experienced many spiritual blessings but were destroyed. A Christian must not give offence to his fellow believer or to God. Every Christian must shun the worship of idols (**10:14**).

In conclusion to Paul's arguments, he discusses the believer's freedom in Christ (**10:23—11:1**). Apparently, Paul cites their feelings: "Everything is permissible" (**10:23**). Yet, Paul argues, "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (**10:24**, see also Christ's example in **Philippians 2:1-11**). As one glances back over the larger section (**8:1—11:1**), one discovers that the first issue dealt with eating food sacrificed to idols (**8:4-7; 10:23—11:1**). Some, so it seems, argued that it was all right to eat meat sacrificed to idols since idols are not gods. As a result of this mindset, some were saying, "Everything is permissible." One should never exercise his freedom when others are hurt by one's actions (**8:7**). Paul reminds the Corinthians that a Christian is always concerned about others (**10:24, 33**). Paul goes right to the root of the problem as he seeks to discard all the underbrush that prevents one's concern for the one who is weak:

> So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [32] Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (**10:31—11:1**).

For Paul, Christians should never engage in any activity that might endanger their own spiritual lives. He hammered home the point that "Christian freedom is freedom for others and for Christ."[8] **First Corinthians 13** is the climax of what started off in **1 Corinthians 8**. If one wishes to understand "love," one must read **chapter 13**. One can hardly read **chapter 13** without a consciousness that love breaks

out—goes far beyond—the circle of enumerated heroic achievements. In the first three verses of this chapter, Paul describes man. All of these gracious acts are vain if one does not have love. Pay attention to Paul as he leaves all human values and ascends to the summit of love:

> If I speak in the tongues[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

If one possesses the gift of prophecy, if one can fathom all mysteries, if one holds all knowledge, and if one has a faith that could remove mountains, but does not have love, it is all for nothing, according to Paul. In this chapter Paul stresses that there is an end to the gifts of grace (**vv 8-11**), but all of these graces shatter in the presence of love if they do not become one with it, the greatest gift of all is love. It is very difficult for some Christians to pass from *then* to *now* in their application of Paul's climax to what he had begun in **Chapter 8**.

This inability to pass from the *then* to *now* is especially true today in the very stiff denominational system of ecclesiastical control exercised by many believers within the Churches of Christ, especially the dictatorial interpretation of some preachers and elders. Within many Christian fellowships, one discovers that their doctrine is a doctrine that is frozen in time—a doctrine with denies the liberty of interpretation. As a result of this mindset, love is thrown out the window. This sectarian spirit can be described as "conscientious factionalism,"[9] that is to say, they are not conscious of their factionalism. This denominational narrowness throws out love. If one does not speak their language and understand their thoughts, one receives the axe. In former times, one went to the stake. Many Christians still made uniformity of doctrine the basis of a true church and the basis of love. How does Paul speak of love in the face of differences within the community of Christ? In **verses 4-7**, Paul paints a very vivid picture of love:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

In these four verses, Paul sets forth the very essence of love. The style and rhythm of these sentences are more than marks of external form or just writing style; he joins one sentence to another with emphasis upon love. One quickly discovers that love does not place itself beyond the tender conscious of the weak. In **8:1—13:13**, Paul calls attention to the behavior of some who sought to elevate their knowledge to the point of destroying the one who did not have perfect understanding. This kind of behavior was the very opposite of the teachings of Jesus. One should not cut himself or herself off from the weaker brother or sister in Christ on the basis of knowledge.

For Paul, love is "not self-seeking." Love does not seek it own way and bitterness remains far from love. In **verses 8-13**, one discovers that the permanence of love is the miracle that can be measured in the face of the passing of all the other gifts of grace. In **1 Corinthians 8:2**, Paul shows that love toward God—not knowledge—is the basis of one being-known-by-God. In this entire section (**8:1—13:13**), Paul sought to ward off the enthusiasm for redemption based on knowledge rather than the message of the Cross. Is it any wonder that Paul begins this Epistle with these words: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**2:2**). In **chapter 13**, Paul develops a definition of love that is unknown in the ancient world. Günther Bornkamm points out with Justice:

> There is no reason to make this chapter into a great sentimentality, if one takes seriously the unflinching antithesis in what it says. . . . Because it is a reality so living, concrete and variedly effective in detail, as it is described in 4—7, and at the same time it is the all-embracing power of God, put into force in the midst of this world as the love of God in Jesus Christ: "The love of Christ holds us bound," controls us (II Cor. 5:14). . . . From this love and in this love the church has its life.[10]

CONCLUSION

First Corinthians 11:1 is about love for one another. It is about condescension. This loaded passage is about toleration; it is about the mindset of Christ. This passage is about the true measurement of love in one's relationship with other believers? In love one sees the permanent presence of salvation as the bond of perfection. Paul, too, captures this concept in his epistle to the Colossians: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (**Colossians 3:14**). Love in **1 Corinthians 13** is not the self-perfection of man, but rather it is the outcome of the redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is in this vein that Jesus says with a great deal of concern: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (**John 15:12**). It is in this same vein that Paul issues his exhortation for unity in spite of differences: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**). Again, Paul writes to the Colossians:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [13] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [14] And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (**Colossians 3:14-15**).

What does "just as Christ accepted you" mean in your relationship with other believers? Is love and unity prerequisite to winning individuals to Christ? How can Christians praise God and win the world? It is through love and unity. Why have I written so much on this short verse (**1 Corinthians 11:1**)? It is simply that I want the world to know and believe that God sent Jesus as the savior of the world. In Jesus' final hours, He prays to the Father about this unity:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: [23] I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (**John 17:20-23**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), unless stated otherwise.

[2] Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979, second printing 1984), 69.

[3] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 31.

[4] In defense of the ones who taught me, one must say that these men were very godly men—men who loved God more than anything else in the world. They were men of their own culture and time. They did the very best that they knew in handling the Word of God. They inherited a particular way of interpreting the Bible, which interpretation frequently created division among many godly men and women.

[5] Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 38.

[6] Ibid.

[7] For a detailed study of "context" and the basic principles of how to interpret the Word of God, see Dallas Burdette, "First Timothy 2:9-15: Literalism and Isolationism of Scripture" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 12 January 2004] located under caption Sermons and Essays and then under subheading Women: Their Role in the Church.

a Or ``*We all possess knowledge," as you say*

b Or *that nothing*

b Deut. 25:4

[8] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Revised Edition (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 81. I recommend this book for everyone's reading.

a Or *languages*

b Some early manuscripts *body that I may boast*

[9] A phrase coined by Bob Lewis. Lewis is a very profound writer and thinker and professor. I am indebted to him for his tireless labor in handling my website. He designed the site and maintains this website on a regular basis.

[10] Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 188.

Speak the Same Thing:
1 Corinthians 1:10

Thrust Statement: **God desires that His people be united in purpose.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 1:10**

> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought (**1 Corinthians 1:10**). [1]

Since this Scripture (**1 Corinthians 1:10**) is appealed to by almost every faction within the Churches of Christ to uphold its separation from other believers, it is necessary to analyze this quotation in order to understand what Paul sought to communicate to the Christians at Corinth. The objective in this essay is not to condemn the men who espouse this incorrect interpretation, but rather, the purpose in this article is to help individuals to understand the intent behind the words of Paul in order to bring about unity for which Jesus Christ prayed (**John 17**).

The words of Paul to the Corinthians are manipulated by many Christians to justify their separation from other believers. This citation is employed by many well-meaning Christians to require conformity to a particular division within the Christian community. The battle cry among many saints is: “agree with us or face excommunication.” The more familiar quotation of this text is from the King James Version: “speak the same thing.” With the voice of confidence, this Scripture is called forth to try to get everyone back into line with the status quo.

But what does this well-known phrase mean? Does Paul set forth the suggestion that every Christian must understand every passage of Scripture without distinction or differences? Is Paul advancing the notion that there can never be disagreements over

doctrinal matters? Each faction of God's people cites this verse to substantiate its divisive spirit. The current interpretation among many believers is an exhibition of exegetical dogmatism. In order to set the stage for a more accurate reading of Paul's now famous citation, it is necessary to give illustrations of how many equally God fearing individuals who rely upon the same passage to validate their severance from others who do not kowtow to smuggled interpretations into the text.

EXAMPLES OF MISUSE OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 1:10

Old Paths Advocate

On December 1, 1932, Homer L. King (1892-1983), editor of the Old Paths Advocate (one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship) cited **1 Corinthian 1:10** as justification for his sectarian position on rejection of other Christians who refuse to acquiesce to his odd interpretations of the Scriptures.[2] In this article, King calls attention to things that he objects to, but which other Christians do participate in. For instance, he writes:

> Is it not a fact that we are pretty well agreed on the things taught in the New Testament, but divided over the things not taught therein? Where in the New Testament do we read about Bible college, instrumental music in the worship, the Sunday school with its human literature, classes, the modern pastorate, the multiplied societies to do the work of the church, and a plurality of drinking cups for each congregation? Are not these the major things over which we are divided? Did the church in the first century have these things? Was there ever a period of time in the history of the church, that greater progress was made?[3]

According to King, in order for unity to exist among the people of God, then one must conform to his comprehension of the Scriptures. If one disagrees with his interpretation, then one is not adhering to Paul's admonition:

> Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (**1 Corinthians 1:10**).[4]

Today, sixty-eight years later, this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement is divided into many warring factions.[5] This group is divided into the bread-breakers and bread-pinchers, wine only versus the grape juice only, baptisteries versus non-baptisteries in the church building, the passing of the collection basket versus going to the communion table to "lay" by one's gift, the order of worship versus no required sequence for the so-called acts of worship (Acts 2:42), non-celebration of Christmas versus the Christmas' celebrators, divorce and remarriage versus the no-divorce for any reason, and so on. Why so much division?

Each faction and fraction of this one-cup movement cites this Scripture to others in order to bring about unity. But how is unity achieved according to this movement? Not on Jesus, but on the bizarre, or weird, understanding of some little

group of believers. The motto of each fellowship is: "speak the same thing." But what does it mean to "speak the same thing"? Well, it simply means this: agree with my brand of orthodoxy or face expulsion from the group. The OPA group is notorious for its factious spirit. It is my way, or no way at all. Remember, the Scripture says, "speak the same thing."

As a result of this same mind-set, King's son, Don King, now editor of the OPA, writes: "Listen, brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup."[6] Again, Kevin W. Presley, also associated with OPA fellowship, lambaste the position on "fellowship in diversity" as being in violation of **1 Corinthians 1:10**:

> The say that since we can't agree upon the doctrines of our Lord, then they are irrelevant to our fellowship. . . . Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I beseech you, brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all SPEAK the same thing, and that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."[7]

The Restorer

One cannot limit this stretching of the text to just the one-cup believers, but this straightforward reading, without consideration of the context, is widespread among other hostile groups. One such writer for another camp is David L. Miller. In *The* Restorer, as guest editorial writer, he bemoans the fact that many advance the notion that the only kind of unity that is possible among believers is "unity in diversity." He says, "Such an attitude over looks important biblical principles."[8] One of the biblical principles he cites is 1 Corinthians 1:10. He correctly states, "Contentions sidetrack individuals from focusing upon Christ and His Word (1 Cor. 1:10-18)."

Miller is on target in his statement about "contentions sidetrack individuals," but, Miller, on the other hand, advances the notion in his essay that in order for unity to exist, then brethren must agree on doctrinal matters. Again, he writes: "the superficial, blind grasping for unity-at-all-cost mentality fails to recognize that division will always exist! According to the Bible, there will never be the kind of unity which some are compromising to achieve."[9] This statement about unity is an overstatement concerning "unity-at-all-cost." Ultimately, Miller believes that in order for one to be in conformity to **1 Corinthians 1:10**, then one must accept his understanding of the Scripture in order not to be sidetracked. But this philosophy is rather naive. The *Old Paths Advocate* writers will not fellowship *The Restorer* writers. *The Restorer* writers will not fellowship the *Old Paths Advocate* writers. How do they justify rejection of each other? Yes, **1 Corinthians 1:10** is utilized to bolster their position of departure.

J. Cleo Scott, another writer for *The Restorer*, writes an article on who can be fellowshipped. He, too, cites **1 Corinthians 1:10** to encourage an interpretation that he has, as well as many others, latched on to this favorite passage to maintain his traditions. He utilizes this Scripture against Christians who advocate the use of instruments in praise to God. It is in this regard that he pens:

> If one attempts to worship God by singing with an instrument invented by man, he is NOT walking in the light, nor walking by faith. Therefore, the child of God cannot walk with (have fellowship with) one who does. The same is true of many other religious innovations such as wearing robes, lighting candles, eating the Lord's supper on Thursday, etc. When my brother joins himself to a religious group that does not walk in the light, then I cannot have fellowship with that brother. He is an erring brother and must be withdrawn from.[10]

Having said this, he seeks justification for his actions toward those who cannot accept his twisting of the Scriptures; he cites **1 Corinthians 1:10** to give substance, so he thinks, to his allegations about who is or who is not walking in the light. If you agree with Scott, then you are walking in the light. If you disagree with Scott, then you are walking in darkness. Scott has been shaped by his traditions, not the Word of God. The Churches of Christ need to do some rethinking in this area. The methods employed in the field of hermeneutics by many Church of Christ editors and writers need a theological overhaul. Much of what they say cannot be justified by the context.

The Spiritual Sword

This paper, like *The Restorer*, advances the same type scenario that Churches of Christ, as a whole, advance in order to maintain their so-called purity—"we are the only ones that are true to the Word of God." Goebel Music seeks to prove, at least to himself, that men can agree on his concept of pattern theology, that is to say, his understanding of the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning in a so-call worship service. He issues a challenge to those who espouse "Unity in Diversity" and demands that all agree on doctrinal matters. He asserts: "Proving and accepting 'pattern' theology. Man can speak the same thing (1. Cor. 1:10)."[11]

Jerry Moffitt also relies upon his interpretation of **1 Corinthians 1:10** to advance his objections to "unity in diversity," which the Scriptures advance in spite of his hostility. Moffitt deals with this Scripture in the same haphazard way he employs other Scriptures in his short article. One stands amazed at the carelessness that Moffitt exhibits in his handling so many texts of Scripture. Before one can understand a particular verse, one must seek to be aware of the whole. It is common sense to realize that one must interpret a verse in a book in light of its whole. One must comprehend the entire work before one can identify with or interpret a particular narrative or individual text. Two men, within the Churches of Christ, became aware of the context of **1 Corinthians 1:10** and called attention to current abuse of this passage to clobber other believers.

He poses the following question: "Will not adherence to God's word promote unity rather than division and diversity?"[12] Yes, God's Word does promote unity among believers, but this same Word also allows for diversity within God's community. The subtlety of Moffitt is again seen in his statement: "The sheer truth is, God not only gave us a faith (Jude 3), he expects us to be able to main UNITY when we receive that faith (Jn. 17:21; I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16)."[13] The assumption on the part

of Moffitt is that the "faith" that Jude speaks of is the interpretation that Moffitt attaches to the Scriptures. Each faction—over twenty-five divisions—claims Jude 3 as its own property.

Again, he says, "Love will cause us to walk in the light (I John 1:7), hold the pattern of sound words (II Tim. 1:13), and all speak the same things (I Cor. 1:10)."[14] One more he assumes that "to walk in the light" is to interpret the Scriptures according to his own interpretative community; he also identifies "sound words" as conformity to his brand of orthodoxy; and finally, he surmises that all believers can and will interpret the Scriptures the same. But, in all of his explanations, he never once analyzes the context; he just assumes that the authors are agreeing with his understanding of Scripture.

As one seeks to understand **1 Corinthians 1:10**, one must consider the point of view of the author, that is to say, the meaning of the author. A second factor in correction interpretation is that one must examine the intended reader, that is, the readers whom the author had in mind; and finally, the ideal reader, that is to say, the reader who has sufficient information to interpret the writings correctly. Since the author spoke for God, then the writer's point of view and God's point of view are the same. It is obvious that the authors of the New Testament books, as well as the Old Testament books, assume that the readers will read the whole of his work in order to understand the particulars. Before one can embark upon the meaning of a particular verse, one must consider the overall meaning of the book. Even though I respect the above brethren, nevertheless, one must dissent emphatically from their teachings on **1 Corinthians 1:10**. One's ignorance of the context can lend an air of plausibility to their interpretation.

Mission Messenger

In 1965, Carl Ketcherside wrote an article that exploded like wild fire within the denominational Churches of Christ. He attacked the traditional interpretation of **1 Corinthians 1:10.** He himself had earlier used this Scripture to hack to death anyone who disagreed with his understanding of God's Word. When Ketcherside went back to the context of this often-cited verse, he discovered that this Scripture was written to bring about unity, not division. Ketcherside states the matter firmly:

> Since every faction in the Christian spectrum, exists on the basis of a special emphasis, either upon a particular scripture or a specific idea, what is the basis for the cult of conformity and order of orthodoxy with the restoration movement of which we are heirs? I think it can be said without fear of denial that the basis of operation centers around 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is a twisting, warping and wresting of this scripture which leads them astray. It is astonishing that a passage written to offset division should be given an interpretation which will open and aggravate numerous festering wounds without ever closing a single one.[15]

This article is an in-depth discussion of the context of Paul's statement to the Corinthians. He correctly calls attention to the fact that the statement (speak the same thing) has nothing to do with conformity of opinion or interpretation.[16] This letter

allows for differences within the body. Paul's letter to Corinth was designed to heal a gap that existed within the fellowship. He did not advance the notion that unity of opinion was prerequisite to unity or acceptance of one another. Just a casual glance at chapter eight reveals that Paul refutes the general interpretation placed upon **1 Corinthians 1:10**. There is room for differences within the body of Christ, but there is no room for division.

Restoration Review

In 1976, Leroy Garrett also addressed **1 Corinthian 1:10**. He begins his analysis by asking several questions: "Does this passage enjoin believers to see everything in the Bible alike? Does it teach that we must see eye to eye on all points of doctrine, that there can be no honest differences of opinion?"[17] In this essay, Garrett reveals the many issues that sincere Christians are divided over. After a brief listing of the many divisions within the Churches of Christ, he concludes that "1 Cor. 1:10 is made to apply only to those items that are peculiar to a particular segment."[18]

Many Christians are reluctant to reject ancient traditions, even when new evidence demonstrates that the old interpretation is not tenable. It is not uncommon for believers to jump to unfounded conclusions without looking at the context. Once more, Garrett puts it graphically: "The truth is that 1 Cor. 1:10, as abused in this manner, never has been, is not now, nor will it ever be consistently practiced by any believer. The reason is simple: it is impossible."[19] Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthian reveals that sameness of viewpoint is not in Paul's mind (**1 Corinthians 8**). In this letter, Paul never calls for conformity, but rather, he calls for love (**1 Corinthians 13**). The only kind of unity that Paul addresses in the church at Corinth is unity in diversity.

CONCLUSION

One should always hesitate before superimposing upon **1 Corinthians 1:10** his/her own speculative and subjective interpretation. If a biblical text is torn out of its biblical context, this verse can be heard to say things that need to be checked by reference to the total revelation of Scripture. This essay has no desire to attack those who follow a path without context. This author is conscious that many expositors are no doubt good and godly men/women; but still, there are interpretations that may not, for all their sincerity, ring true to the biblical revelation itself. The position of this paper is to not to condemn but to seek to lead Christians into a clearer understanding of God's Word. According to some, as noted above, their collective judgments, or interpretations, establish God's truth in unchangeable monument. In other words, their decisions are free from error.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless otherwise noted.

[2] See Homer L. King, "CAN'T WE AGREE ON SOMETHING," *Old Paths Advocate* LV, no. 10 (November 1, 1983): 1, 6.

[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[5] For a brief history of this strange religious movement, see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 3 February 2001], located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading THE LORD'S SUPPER

[6] Don L. King, "Editorial: Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2.

[7] Kevin W. Presley, "NEO-DENOMINATIONALISM IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 1.

[8] David L. Miller, "Division," *The Restorer* 6, no. 8 (August 1986): 2.

[9] Ibid.

[10] J. Cleo Scott, "Whom May I Fellowship," *The Restorer* 6, no. 10 (October 1986): 4.

[11] Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 1 (October 1980): 20.

[12] Jerry Moffitt, "IS UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY POSSIBLE?", *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983): 18.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 19.

[15] Carl Ketcherside, "Conformity or Diversity," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 7 (July 1965): 101.

[16] Ibid., 102.

[17] Leroy Garrett, "That You All Speak the Same Thing," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 5 (May 1976): 282.

[18] Ibid., 283.

[19] Ibid.

The Folly and Scandal of the Cross

Thrust Statement: **God comes to the world in and through Jesus Crucified.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**

If you had lived in the first century and had heard about God becoming flesh and dying upon a Cross for a sin offering, how would you have reacted? In the twenty-first century, how do you react to the death of Jesus upon the Cross? Have you accepted Christ as the One who introduces meaning and order into one's human relationships? Do you think God belongs to the childhood of humanity and that you have outgrown your need of Christ though education? Do you think you have outgrown your need of Christ through your own moral achievements? Men and women cannot determine their own worthiness for the kingdom of God through their own moral achievements. Without Christ, one observes the world seeking something that is loftier, at least to them, than the message about God's Way of salvation. Yet, Christians need to stand firm and proclaim Jesus as the only way of salvation (**Acts 4:12**). In the words of J. H. Oldham, "The Cross cannot be taken out of Christianity without changing it beyond recognition."[1]

It is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin, which separates man from God, can be removed. This truth that Jesus is the only way to God is a truth that is always single and exclusive. In this spiritual truth (**4:6**, "I am the way"), Christians cannot be tolerant. This one truth excludes the possibility of recognizing any other substitute, or way, to God. It is in Jesus that God has found, as it were, a firm footing with humanity (**Romans 3:21-26**). The presence of God in one's life begins in Christ Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:19**, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ"). Without Jesus there is no hope. God sent and gave Jesus for the salvation of men and women. As one reflects upon the Incarnation, one comes away with the understanding that the Incarnation is the divine and merciful answer to humanity's falling away from God. One can expect deliverance only through the act of God in sending His Son for the sins of the world (**John 3:16**, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son").

It is only through faith in Him that one can expect deliverance from condemnation (**3:36**, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life"). Faith is God's gift to humanity. Faith in His Son is the only means of redemption. God in His wisdom chose faith as the instrument, or channel, through which He would impute (credit) His righteousness to the one who puts his or her faith in Jesus for salvation (**Romans 1:16-17**, "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last"). Faith in Jesus means allowing oneself to be humbled, and, at the same time, faith is the boldness in which one accepts the unspeakable mercy of God in and through His Son Jesus. For one to live in faith is to live in a spirit of thankfulness for the Cross of Calvary. The Christian life is a life of thankfulness for God's mercy in and through His Son Jesus. The message of the Gospel should melt the hearts of men and women. What does the Cross mean to you? Do you sing to God in your heart about redemption?

As you reflect upon salvation, do you think that God's way of salvation is foolishness? Is God's way of salvation a scandal to you? Do you understand the wisdom and love of God in providing a way of rescue from His righteous wrath through faith, not works? According to Paul, the message of the Cross is the mystery of the Gospel that had been hidden from ages past (**Ephesians 1:3-14**) but is now revealed. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, addresses the so-called folly (μωριψα mwria) and scandal (σκαψνδαλον skandalon) of the Cross (σταυροψ stauros) in the lives of Gentiles and Jews. For both the cultivated Gentile and the virtuous Jew, the story of Jesus dying upon the Cross was sheer folly and a shameful scandal.

In today's society, many feel that they no longer need religion, as they call it. The church cannot and must not relax its task of reaching out to the world at large. W. A. Visser't Hooft correctly states: "The task of the Church is to carry forward the work of the Redeemer."[2] People are living in a modern society of scientific technology. Yet, one witnesses suicide among young people under the age of twenty-five as the third leading cause of death.[3] People have a need to belong, at least to something that gives identity. In the USA, youth gangs have increased by 286 to 4,800 during the years 1980—1996.[4] This report states: "Now, as then, gangs provide identity and social relationships for some young people who feel marginalized by the dominant social, economic, and cultural environments in which they live."[5] This report also calls attention to certain behavior before it is classified as a gang: "A group must be involved in a pattern of criminal acts to be considered a youth gang."[6]

With scientific knowledge and the so-called higher education of no absolutes—truth is relative—one quickly realizes that humanity has not arrived at the glorious age of utopia. Knowledge and the wisdom of the world have not overcome the great enemies of human life. The world is <u>not</u> becoming better and better with the passing of time. War and hate still plague this world. World War I (1914-19018) and World War II (1939-1945) reveal the wisdom of the world, a world without God. During WW I, there were over 8,528,831 who were killed or died as a result of this atrocity.[7] These statistics do not suggest that one should do away with science, but rather to remind individuals that the modern world does not touch the problem of humanity—sin. The only thing that will correct the problems of the world is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified One.

The Cross of Christ is a condemnation of the values of the world. It is through the Cross of Christ that God reveals His wrath against sin, and, at the same time, it reveals His purpose to save the world. God has chosen the Church as the vehicle to communicate to the world this message of salvation through Jesus. Many today are conscious that something besides knowledge is needful if one wishes to introduce meaning into human relationships. One who has been given grace as a sinful human being will desire to share this grace with others. The one who has received this grace undeservedly cannot be intolerant or arrogant toward others. Jesus and Him crucified is the answer to humanity's dilemma. In the words of Emil Brunner:

In fact, we may say, love as grounded in Jesus Christ is the only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance, because this love springs from the humiliation of man, who acknowledges that truth is not in him, but comes to him, has come to him, and must come to him always, if he is to stay in it. And that truth can never be his own property but is always a present of divine mercy.[8]

Humanity is stuck fast in the mire of heavy mud, a mud that will not turn loose. One cannot lift himself or herself out this mud of hopelessness. J. H. Oldham is correct when he writes: "Every effort to save ourselves is a fresh assertion of our own individual will. And it is our individualism, our self-centeredness and self-sufficiency that separate us from love."[9] God comes to the world in Jesus Christ. Only God can bring about rescue from the dilemma that men and women find themselves in. Numerous individuals within the Christian community seek to earn their salvation through perfect knowledge and obedience to certain rituals performed in a so-called worship service. The message of the cross is not central in their theology.

Many Christians have not understood this revolutionary doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus. For countless Christians, Christianity is a legalistic code, not the gift of God. Christianity has been watered down by rationalism and legalism. Unity within the fellowship of the redeemed can only find expression in the common faith, namely, Jesus (**John 17:20-26**). One can never obtain unity within the fellowship of the redeemed when the Gospel is transformed into a new law. This new law equals tradition and this tradition is accepted on a footing of equality with Scripture. The Church is an inward fellowship of faith and love based upon the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, not perfection in understanding of God's Word (**Galatians 3:6-9**).

As one reflects upon **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, one discovers that the revelation of Jesus Christ is the unique event in history—God became flesh in order to save mankind (**John 1:1-18**). Lots of Christians still trust in their own performance in the hope of becoming pious and well pleasing to God (see also **Romans 10:1-3**). They do not rely upon the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. God comes to His creation in Jesus Christ, the savior of sinners. For the Christian, the Incarnation, the death of Christ, and the resurrection constitutes the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. What is your theology of the Cross? As one seeks new life, one cannot begin anywhere else except in the deed of Christ upon the Cross. As one approaches this text of Paul in his Corinthian correspondence, one cannot help but reflect upon the final revelation of God in Jesus—the story of God's act of mercy. Since one cannot save himself or herself, one must turn to the Old Testament to piece together God's scheme

of redemption revealed earlier through His Law, His prophets, and His writings. It is in this vein that Brunner writes:

> That is the meaning of the story which begins with Abraham and Moses and proceeds to the prophets, including that greatest of the prophets, who tells us of the servant of God who suffers for our sakes and burdens himself with our guilt.[10]

From just a casual reading of the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles, one is immediately conscious that to both the cultural Greek and the pious Jew that the message of the cross was sheer folly as well as a scandal. Paul, in his pericope about Christ, the Wisdom and the Power of God, writes: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). With all the wisdom of the ancient world, the Gentiles were still groaning under the burden of sin and longing for some hitherto unknown remedy that would be adequate to the wants of their entire nature. On the other hand, the Jews, even with their Law, also were longing for something that would ease their conscious. Neither Gentile nor Jew could eliminate the burden of sin. Before God could send His Son, God had to prepare mankind for the reception of Christianity. He did this by making both Gentile and Jew conscious of their own helplessness—one without the Law and one with the Law.

Paul expresses God coming in the flesh this way: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). What was the message that Paul and others declared throughout the Empire? Luke, a companion of Paul, gives a number of Sermons in the **Book of Acts** from which one can discover the focus of their message. The following four sermons found in the **Book of Acts** illustrates the central theme preached wherever they went: (1) **Acts 2:14-39**, (2) **3:12-26**; (3) **4:8-12**; and (4) **10:36-48**. Peter began his Pentecostal sermon with the pronouncement that the promise of the coming of the Messiah had arrived (**2:14-16**). This sermon summarizes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (**2:22-35**). One also observes that this sermon announces that the events that had just transpired were the fulfillment of prophecy (**2:14-22; 2:29-35**) And finally, one observes the invitation for men and women to repent and to be baptized and to receive the Holy Spirit (**2:38**).

In this first sermon by Peter, one observes the centrality of the crucifixion. The Cross of Jesus stands out in a very vivid manner: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,[b] put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (**2:23**). Again, Peter proclaims: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (**2:36**). In Peter's second sermon, as recorded by Luke, to some onlookers, after talking about the death of Jesus, proclaims: "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. [18] But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ[a] would suffer" (**3:17**).

Following this event before the onlookers, one finds Peter and John defending their faith in Christ before the Sanhedrin (**4:1-26**). During the course of the message about Christ, Peter tells the Sanhedrin: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is

no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**4:12**). Then in Peter's sermon before Cornelius and his household, Peter declares: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**10:43**). Just a casual reading of the other sermons in the **Book of Acts** reveals the same focus—Jesus and Him crucified for the sins of the world.

In spite of the fact that Isaiah had prophesied concerning a suffering Messiah (**Isaiah 53**), the Jews could not harmonize the words of Moses in the **Book of Deuteronomy**: "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (**21:23**). The Cross to the Jew was an insuperable barrier to the acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah. The apostles sought to overcome this obstacle by citing the prophets to prove that they had foretold these events, even the resurrection of Jesus. The apostles demonstrated from the Old Testament that this Servant of God paid the debt for the sins of both men and women. He did this in order that He might overcome the distance between God and sinful humanity. He suffered a criminal's death in their place. He removed all barriers for one to approach God. Yes, Jesus cleared the way for everyone to approach God, something that no man or woman could do. Jesus suffered the accursed death that everyone should have suffered. Jesus tells Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**).

These remarks of Jesus to Nicodemus go right to the heart of redemption. God sent His Son in order that everyone who trusts in Jesus could stand before Him. Salvation is about what God has done, not what man has done. It is all God's doing; it is His work of grace. Sins are remitted by His pure gift of grace. All this praise for salvation falls on God alone—nothing on behalf of the work of men and women. Paul writes: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). These two verses capture the very essence of the folly and scandal of the cross. The message of the Cross leaves everything to the operation of God for salvation; it is God's gift of grace. Paul writes about this message as being "the power of God": "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (**1:18**).

The Greeks seek after wisdom, but the Jews desire their good works to merit their favor with God. It is in this vein concerning the Jews' desire to earn their salvation that Paul penned the following words:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness (**Romans 10:1-3**).

This salvation by grace through faith was too easy for the Jews. If salvation is really the operation of God, what is there for one to do? Will this attitude not open the floodgates for a life of wickedness? Is there no room for one's own sense of responsibility? Will not such a message of justification by faith make life trivial and

worthless? Is there a case for one's own exertion of good works in his or her own life as a believer? For the Jews, this message of salvation through the finished work of Christ on the Cross was a stumbling block. The message of the Cross is about God's wisdom versus man's wisdom. God's wisdom consists in His making salvation available by faith alone in His Son Jesus. Paul calls attention to the distinction:

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (**1 Corinthians 1:21-25**).

Since all individuals have sinned, there is no way that one can bring about his or her own salvation. Paul paints a portrait of the Gentiles' dilemma in **Romans** (**1:18—2:16**) without the written Law of God and the Jews' dilemma (**2:17—3:19**) with the written Law of God—both are still under condemnation. In his summary, he writes:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**3:19-20**).

For Paul, the Law shuts everyone's mouth. Even though Paul draws a rather dismal picture of fallen humanity's plight, he does not leave men and women without hope. He concisely states in **Romans 3:21-31** what he develops in (**1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**). Paul never tires of writing about the message of the Cross—Christ crucified. Listen to Paul as he seeks to unfold the mystery of God's wisdom to both Jew and Gentile:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. [29] Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of

> Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, [30] since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. [31] Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (**Romans 3:21-31**).

Within the Christian community today, many Christians still cannot believe that salvation is by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. This rejection of salvation by grace is a revolt of one's natural pride. Paul labored the point of Abraham's justification through faith in the **fourth chapter of Romans**. Pay attention once more to Paul as he seeks to drive home this point:

> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. [3] What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness"[a] (**4:2-3**).

How did Abraham receive the righteousness of God? Paul says through faith. The message of the Cross is the Gospel of God. Justification by faith is an act of grace and mercy, not works. The message of the Cross is God's wisdom. This wisdom is demonstrated in making Jesus one's righteousness. How does this happen? Is it by works or by faith? Paul labors this point in the Roman letter. In **Romans 1:16-17**, Paul lays down the theme—justification by faith:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."[b]

Those in Christ are in Christ because of God (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). Jesus Christ is God's wisdom. How? God's wisdom is displayed in and through Jesus by His being made our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption (**1:31**). This new life in Christ cannot begin anywhere except in the deed of Christ upon the Cross. In the Cross of Jesus one witnesses the redeeming act of God—His wisdom. Since salvation is by faith in the atoning work of Christ, does this not open the doors to a life of rebellion against holiness in one's daily walk? The answer is no! Paul deals with this philosophy in **Romans 6**. One wonders how anyone could appropriate God's gift of redemption and continue to live a life in defiance of God's grace (**Titus 2:11-14**). The simplicity of this new obedience is that one seeks to do what is good and pleasing to God because of His grace. Every believer seeks to live his or her life in such a way that it becomes an expression of the prayer taught by Jesus to His disciples: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:10**).

Whenever one seeks God's guidance, God's grace influences his or her ideas and ways. When one exercises faith in Christ, one is conscious that one's past is buried in Christ under the Cross—one's guilt is there. For every believer, Christ is the object of his or her faith—the crucified One. Since this is so, every Christian's morality is as a result of his or her faith. One cannot have Christian morality without having faith in the crucified One. Are you living in the love of God so that you reflect the rays of His

light in your life? The meaning of His death on the Cross is exemplified in one's walk with Him in holiness. God's act in Christ gives one the incentive to let his or her light shine so that the world may glorify God (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Do you worship God in your daily walk? When one fails to have a high regard for God, true faith ceases to exist in his or her life. One might say, according to Brunner, "The end of true reverence is the end of true religion."[11]

CONCLUSION

In **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, Paul discloses the revelation of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. This enigma about holiness and mercy is what baffles the minds of both men and women. For the world, God's honor and God's wrath have no place within a philosophical concept of God. The God of the philosophers is not the God of the Bible, but of thought. The God of the Bible is described as: God is love. As one reflects upon God's Law, one is conscious that law, in and of itself, is unchangeable, static, timeless, and the eternal will of God. From this point of view of the law, there can be only one possibility—destruction for disobedience. Yet, the Gospel of God, which is disclosed in Jesus, is about God's love. This love takes hold of us in Christ. The sending of Christ was the only way for God to maintain His justice, and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity (**Romans 3:25-26**).

Even today, within many Christian communities, one discovers that scores of believers still cannot accept this radical message of free grace. In **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, Paul sets forth forgiveness and justification of the sinner through the suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53** as the folly and scandal of both Gentile and Jew. The message of the Cross is the unity of God's holiness and God's love manifested in the crucified One. The message of the Cross is that through Jesus, God has broken down the barrier of sin that separated Him from His creatures. It is in Jesus that God his linked humanity to Himself in peace and reconciliation through belief in the One who made atonement for the sins of the World. It is in Christ crucified that God reveals that His love is unconditional (**Romans 5:6**, "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.") It is in Jesus that the guilt of sin is removed.

As one peruses the world religions, one thing that one will never find in the religions of the world is that God became a man in order to redeem man. One will never find in the religions of the world the teaching that a man came to earth to reconcile fallen humanity to Himself by the sacrifice of His life for those who had become separated from Himself through their guilt and sin. This teaching is what appeared folly to the world at large. Yet, this teaching is what separates Christianity from the religions of the world.

The Gospel of Jesus is just this—sinful men and women who are estranged from God through their sins are restored by the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, gave His life a ransom for many: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," said Jesus (**Matthew 20:28**). The Gospel of Jesus is about the guilt of sin being removed in and through Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus reveals that men and women do not find a way to God, but rather God comes to all through faith in His Son. God's purpose is to save the world in and through Jesus. As one reflects upon the message of the Cross, one discovers that the Cross of Jesus is a condemnation of the values of the world. The following words of Paul in this

study (**1 Corinthians 2:1-8**) sums up Paul's desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified:

> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[c] 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

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[1] Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft and Dr. J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its function in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1938), 142.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet" [on-line]; available from http://cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm; Internet; accessed 20 October 2003.

[4] Youth Violence Prevention, "Gangs" [on-line]; available from http://www.safeyouth.org/topics/gangs.htm.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Table 4: Armed Forces Mobilized and Casualties in World War 1" [CD-Rom]. Deluxe Edition 2002. Prepared by John Graham and Royde-Smith, editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* copyright 1994-2002.

[8] Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1951). 28.

[9] J. M. Oldham, *Life is Commitment* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 76, 77.

[10] Emil Brunner, "The Folly and Scandal of the Cross," in *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 58.

b Or *of those not having the law* (that is, Gentiles). Footnotes with the letters of the alphabet are associated with the Scripture citations as given in the NIV.

a Or *Messiah*; also in verse 20

f Or *his only begotten Son*

b Jer. 9:24

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

a Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22

a Or *is from faith to faith*

b Hab. 2:4

[11] Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 27.

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God~s mystery*

The Mystery of Godliness

Thrust Statement: **Paul's hymn sets forth the Gospel in its essentials.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Timothy 3:9, 15-16.**

December begins the season in which people are reminded of the birth of Jesus. Two thousand years ago, an angel of God announced the birth of the Messiah. The month of December is a time in which people gather in churches to hear about the birth of the One who came to bring salvation to a lost and dying world. The prophets foretold the birth of Jesus and searched diligently as to the time of this grace coming from God. They wanted to know the time and circumstances of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. Even the angelic host desired to stoop low and look into things that would transpire with the birth of the Messiah. In effect, none understood perfectly the events surrounding "the mystery of godliness."

Before one embarks upon an exposition of **1 Timothy 3:14-16**, perhaps it would be beneficial to reflect upon Matthew's and Luke's account of the birth of Jesus Christ. The two accounts give insight as to the miraculous nature of the events that transpired in the incarnation of Jesus. Matthew begins his book by calling attention to the circumstances surrounding the coming of Jesus:

> 18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was
> pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was
> found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her
> husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public
> disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had
> considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,
> "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,

because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." [24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (**Matthew 1:18-24**).[1]

One cannot read this text without a consciousness that the birth of Christ involved the miraculous: "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (**1:20**). Not only does Matthew call attention to the miraculous, but he also calls awareness to the prophetic nature of the birth of Christ: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet" (**1:22**). Approximately 740 years earlier, **Isaiah** (**7:14**) had foretold the coming of this One who is also called "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." One cannot mull over the words of Paul to Timothy (**1 Timothy 3:14-16**) without contemplation upon both Matthew and Luke in their birth accounts of Jesus. Luke's account of an angel's visit to some shepherds tending to their flocks is also quite illuminating:

[8] And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." [13] Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." [15] When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." [16] So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. [17] When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, [18] and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. [20] The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (**Luke 2:8-20**).

In the reading of these two accounts concerning the birth of Jesus, the prophet Micah comes to mind, especially with the words of the shepherds: "Let's go to Bethlehem." Approximately 735 years earlier, Micah prophesied concerning the birth of Jesus that the angels announced in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels:

> But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (**Micah 5:2**).

The words "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" address the origin of the One to be born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**; **Matthew 1:21-23**). In other words, His origin is much earlier than his human birth. Jesus, in one of His encounters with the Jews, informed the Jews: "before Abraham was born, I am!" (**John 8:58**). It is significant that Jesus did not say, "I was," but rather, "I am." Thus, Jesus expresses the eternity of His being and of His oneness with the Father.

In the prophecy by Micah (**2:5**) concerning the birthplace of Jesus, Matthew says regarding the visit of the Magi: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem [2] and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (**Matthew 2:1-2**). Did the religious leaders understand **Micah 2:5** as being Messianic in tone? Yes! Listen once more to Matthew as he reports conversations from the religious leaders in their response to a question from Herod concerning the whereabouts of His birth:

> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: [6] "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (**Matthew 2:3-5**).

This One "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (**Micah 5:2**) is the same One whom John speaks of in his prologue to his Gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men (**John 1:1-4**).

John steps back into eternity as he seeks to divulge something of the preexistence of the Word. Then he climaxes this prologue with: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**1:14**). Again, one stands in awe as one reads a prayer of Jesus to the Father:

> "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. [2] For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. [3] Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. [4] I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (**17:1-5**).

In the writings of Paul, one observes one who is filled with the wonder of it all. As Paul sat in prison in Rome, he writes to the Ephesians (AD 61) the following words as he reflects upon "the mystery of his will":

> [3] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [4] For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. [9] And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. [11] In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, [12] in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. [13] And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:3-14**).

If one wishes to understand clearly the "mystery" that Paul develops in the Ephesian epistle, then one needs to read the Book of Ephesians as a whole—read the book as a book. Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand the redemption events that transpired "in Christ Jesus":

> [7] I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10] His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. [13] I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory (**3:7-13**).

Paul says that God chose to make this mystery—"the manifold wisdom of God"—known through the church. Today, the church—God's family—is the "pillar and ground" of proclaiming this gospel—Jesus as God's way of salvation. This way of salvation is through faith in Jesus as God's atonement for the sins of the world. This

introduction to "the mystery of godliness" brings one to the beginning of this message of Paul to Timothy concerning "the mystery of the faith" (**1 Timothy 3:9**), which he also equates with "The Mystery of Godliness" (**3:16**). Paul expresses this "mystery of godliness" in poetic fashion, which constitutes, perhaps, one of the earliest creeds of the church and, no doubt, was one of the earliest songs of the church:

> Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (**3:16**).

"The mystery of godliness" is that God in the person of Jesus Christ entered this world (**John 1:1, 14**) in which He paid the penalty for man's transgression of God's Law in order to redeem all those who put their trust in Him (**Romans 3:21-26**). That this mystery of devotion (ευςσεψβεια, eusebeia, "to be devout," "piety") refers to Christ is evident from the fact that what follows in **verse 16** (**1 Timothy 3**) refers to Him. Paul also articulates this "mystery" in his second letter to the Corinthians:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

This "mystery of godliness" (**1 Timothy 3:16**) = "the word of truth" (**Ephesians 1:13**) and this "word of truth" = "the gospel of your salvation" (**1:13**) and this "gospel of your salvation" = "the mystery of the faith" (**1 Timothy 3:9**) and "the mystery of the faith" = "Christ, the hope of glory" (**Colossians 1:25-28**). Paul expresses this same truth in his first letter to Corinth this way: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). The two expressions employed—"The mystery of the faith" (**1 Timothy 3:9**) and "the mystery of piety" (**3:16**)—pertain to our faith and to our devotion to glorify Him.[2]

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

He Appeared in A Body

Paul begins this "mystery of godliness" by calling attention to the incarnation—"He appeared in a body" (**3:16a**). The virgin birth is not limited to only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Paul, too, zeros in on the virgin birth in that God prepared a body for Jesus. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (AD 48/49), addresses this subject: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4**). The author of Hebrews presents this same concept:

> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— [15] and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. [16] For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. [17] For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. [18] Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (**Hebrews 2:14-18**).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is found throughout the New Testament writings. For example, Paul, in writing to the Philippians, expresses the incarnation this way: "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!" (**Philippians 2:8**). As cited above, John, an Apostle of Jesus, begins his Gospel with the following words: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (**John 1:14**). Again, as quoted above, the author of Hebrews writes: "He too shared in their humanity" (**Hebrews 2:14**). One cannot deny that Paul believed in the incarnation of Jesus. Paul starts his Roman epistle with the following eye-catching words: "Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David" (**Romans 1:3**). Once more, the author of Hebrews cites **Psalm 40-6-8** to demonstrate that God prepared a body for Jesus: "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; [6] with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased'" (**Hebrews 10:5-6**).

Today there are religious groups who deny the virgin birth, that is to say that God "appeared in a body" ("manifested in the flesh," KJV), and who also deny that Jesus was "vindicated by the Spirit" ("justified in the Spirit," KJV). John, too, combated this form of denial of Jesus' humanity in the philosophy of Gnosticism—a group that denied that Jesus had a flesh and blood body. But this same belief was also true among many Jews. As John seeks to combat the denial of Jesus humanity, he writes: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (**2 John 7**). What should the reaction of Christians be against those who deny this basic fundamental truth of the gospel: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (**John 1:14**)? Listen to John as he explains the critical nature of this belief: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. [11] Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (**2 John 10**). Earlier John had warned about the antichrist:

> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (**1 John 4:1-3**).

The church cannot falter in upholding neither the doctrine of the virgin birth nor the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (**1 Timothy 3:15**). The church must uphold the doctrines set forth in **1 Timothy 3:16**. The church holds forth the words of life to a lost and dying world. The gospel of God must be preached. What is the gospel? Listen to Paul as he explains to Timothy: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel" (**2 Timothy 2:8**). This condensed statement concerning the essence of the gospel by Paul equals the first two points of his creed in **1 Timothy 3:16**: "He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit." In **2 Timothy 2:8**, the phrase "raised from the dead" is equivalent to "vindicated by the Spirit" and "descended from David" is equivalent to "he appeared in a body." These two doctrines are reversed in **2 Timothy 2:8** from **1 Timothy 3:16**.

Vindicated By the Spirit

As one reflects upon the words "vindicated by the Spirit," one cannot help but ponder this particular phrase. Just what does this saying mean? This expression may be multifaceted in its depth. For one thing, one can surely say that Jesus was "vindicated by the Sprit" in his resurrection. Paul addresses this concept in Romans: "Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (**Romans 1:4**). The resurrection of Jesus proves everything. The KJV's rendering of "justified in the Spirit" is somewhat confusing. The word *justified* is not used in the same sense that it is used when the word is applied to Christians. With Jesus, the word carries with it the idea of vindication, or exoneration. In spite of the fact of His crucifixion, the Holy Spirit vindicated Jesus from all charges through Christ's resurrection. The Holy Spirit furnished the evidence that He was the Son of God, that is to say, justified His claims.

Also, one should not forget the role that the Holy Spirit played in His life. Matthew informs his readers that at the conception of Mary that an angel of God told Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:20**). Also, at the baptism of Jesus, Matthew again informs his readers about how Jesus, following His baptism, "He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him" (**3:16**). John, too, records the words of Jesus concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in relationship to Himself:

> But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. [8] When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me (**John 16:7-8**).

Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, gives further testimony concerning the Holy Spirit and Himself: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit" (**3:34**). Also, on the day of Pentecost, Peter says, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. [33] Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (**Acts 2:32-33**). On the day of Pentecost, three thousand responded to gospel call and were added to the Christian

community (**2:41, 47**). Once more, one witnesses the vindication of Jesus' ministry with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all those that accepted Jesus as the One whom God made both Lord and Christ (**2:36**). With this outpouring of the Spirit and the conversion of three thousand, one is again confronted with proof that the Holy Spirit vindicated the Redeemer—the One sent from God for the salvation of humanity.

Seen by Angels

As one reflects upon this statement by Paul, one cannot help but call to mind the role that angels played in the ministry of Jesus. Luke records an encounter that some shepherds experienced with an angel of God. One witnesses an angel announcing the birth of the Messiah:

> 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch
> over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the
> glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the
> angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy
> that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has
> been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You
> will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a
> great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God
> (**Luke 2:8-13**).

Not only did an angel appear at the birth of Jesus, but Luke also informs Theophilus, the one to whom Luke wrote his Gospel, that Jesus in His final hours, while praying on the Mount of Olives, an angel of God appeared to Jesus in order to strengthen Him:

> 39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed
> him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall
> into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt
> down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet
> not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him
> and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly,
> and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (**22:39-44**).

The author of Hebrews also calls alertness to the angelic host at the birth of Jesus: "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (**Hebrews 11:6**). Furthermore, as cited above, Luke informs Theophilus: "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God" (**Luke 2:13**). Luke opens the birth of Jesus with angels present and closes the life of Jesus with an angel strengthening Him (**22:43**). Following Matthew's account of the Temptation of Jesus, he, too, describes the task that angels played in the ministry of Jesus: "Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him" (**Matthew 4:11**).

The writers of the New Testament zero in on the interest that the angels had in Him and His work, and they came to Him in His sorrows and in His troubles. Paul, in

his poetic section (**1 Timothy 3:16**), seeks to give an imposing vision of the splendor and magnificence of the heavenly host, which drew them from the skies that they might announce His coming, take care of Him in His temptations, behold His crucifixion, and keep an eye on Him in the tomb. Even though the religious leaders despised the work of Christ in His day, nevertheless, the angels of God manifested the deepest interest in Him:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

Preached Among the Nations

As one mulls over these words of Paul in **1 Timothy 3:16**, one can hardly fail to recall the words of Jesus to His disciples before His ascension:

> [18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

The disciples were to "go and make disciples of all nations." How were they to make disciples? They made disciples by preaching the Gospel, which is Jesus as God's way of salvation. Mark expresses the same truth as found in Matthew this way: "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:16**).

Just a perusal of the **Book of Acts** reveals that the Apostles and the disciples of Jesus preached Christ wherever they went. During the early days of Christianity, a dissension arose over the neglect of Grecian widows in the distribution of daily food (**Acts 6:1-2**). Out of this controversy, seven men who were "full of the Spirit and wisdom" were chosen to oversee this work (**6:3**). The Apostles declined oversight of this needed work in order to devote themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (**6:4**). As a result of the preaching of Jesus, Luke says, "the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly" (**6:7**). Following the preaching and persecution of Stephen (**Chapter 7**), one of the seven Deacons (Philip) went to Samaria and "proclaimed the Christ there" (**8:5**). His preaching was so powerful that Luke records the results with the following penetrating words:

> But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and

> women. [13] Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (**8:12-13**).

As one seeks to understand what it is that they preached, one cannot help but observe the terminology employed to describe the Gospel that they preached. This differentiation should assist Christians in their understanding of what it is that one should preach. For example, the following description should aid one in comprehending the substance of their preaching and how they described it: (1) "preached the word" [**8:4**], (2) "proclaimed the Christ" [**8:5**], and (3) "preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus" [**8:12**]. With all of these explanatory terms, Luke informs Theophilus that the Apostles in Jerusalem had heard that the people in Samaria "had accepted the word of God" (**8:14**). Surely the Apostles must have shared The Great Commission issued by the resurrected Christ before His ascension.

This One who was "despised and rejected by men" (**Isaiah 53:3**) is now universally heralded as the Savior of the world. Peter in his address before the Sanhedrin goes right to the heart of the Gospel: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). This phrase—"preached among the nations"—is a reference to the worldwide mission of the Christian community. The missionary journeys of Paul reveal the nature of this evangelistic campaign to proclaim Jesus as the Savior of the world. In the proclamation of Christ, Paul sets forth the idea that the Gospel is for all who respond to the Good News of God's kingdom—whether Jews or Gentiles. His missionary activities in Ephesus eventually resulted in his writing to the Christians in Asia Minor concerning this mystery made known to him by revelation (**Ephesians 3:3**). Immediately, he explains this mystery: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (**3:6**).

Paul continuously develops this mystery in his epistles. For instance, in his letter to the Colossians, he speaks of the mystery that had been hidden from ages and from generations now made known to his saints (**Colossians 1:26**). Then in the very next breath, he tells what this mystery is:

> To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (**1:27-29**).

Even in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he elaborates on the object of preaching by himself and others involved in this evangelistic outreach:

> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who

believe. [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (**1 Corinthians 1:20-25**).

Believed On in the World

This faith in Jesus was as a result of the pre-ascension mandate to evangelize the world. One cannot read the **Book of Acts** and other books without a consciousness of the impact that the Gospel had in the lives of those who heard the Good News of God's way of salvation by faith in His Son. One witnesses, not only rejection, but one also witnesses thousands responding to the preaching about Jesus. This phrase—"believed on in the world"—is an allusion to the success of Jesus being "preached among the nations." Within fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and the other apostles preached to thousands on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-14**).

Three thousand on that one day believed the message about Jesus (**2:41**). Following this event, one finds Peter and John in trouble with the religious authorities (**4:1**). Within just a short time, the number of disciples grew to about five thousand (**4:4**). Luke gives the background of this scenario and the results of their preaching:

> The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. [2] They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. [3] They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. [4] But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand (**4:1-4**).

One cannot read the **Book of Acts** without an awareness of the success that the preaching about Jesus accomplished. One more example from the **Book of Acts** should suffice to confirm once more the statement of Paul to Timothy that Jesus "was believed on in the world." Luke also reports the result of Philip's preaching in Samaria:

> But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. [13] Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (**8:12**).

Taken Up in Glory

One stands in awe as one contemplates the ascension of Christ. Today, Christ is at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is there, but, at the same time, He is here in His people. He is waiting for you to approach the throne of grace with boldness. Have you talked with Him today? Have you thanked Him for your redemption? This marvelous hymn about Christ moves from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. Christians

today still carry the burden of conveying this "mystery of godliness" to the world. This event was the crowning grandeur of the work of Christ. Surely this occurrence must have thrilled even the angels in heaven itself. John, the Apostle, gives a glimpse of the exhilaration and marvel of it all by the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the angelic host numbering into thousands upon thousands (**Revelation 5:6-14**). John describes the behavior of the angels this way:

> [11] Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. [12] In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (**5:11-12**).

The author of Hebrews, too, was conscious of the grandeur of His ascension and its implications for believers. He seeks to capture the importance of this event within the scheme of redemption:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

Is it any wonder that Paul says that Jesus "was taken up in glory"? This is a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. Every Christian should keep this truth in mind as he/she goes about sharing the Good News about Jesus as the only way to God. Yes, Jesus passed through the heavens, that is to say, He entered into God's presence. And, as a result of this ascension, everyone who puts his/her trust in Jesus has access to God. In other words, Jesus opened the way for individuals to approach God; He is there at the throne of grace to intercede on behalf of those who come. Again, the writer-preacher expresses this same truth this way: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (**7:25**).

As one reflects upon "who has gone through the heavens," one also recalls the words of this epistle in **chapter 8**, **verses 1** and **2**: "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." This statement is an affirmation of His ministry and His position as High Priest. One can readily see why Paul in his first epistle to Timothy listed the ascension as of major importance in the proclamation of the Gospel. Once more listen to the preacher as he sets forth this truth concerning the ascension and humanity's redemption through the blood of Jesus:

> When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. [12] He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (**9:11-12**).

Jesus offered His own life to God in order to make atonement for sinful humanity, to open the way for mankind to approach God fully with confidence, and to create the new covenant that Jeremiah (**31:33-34**) had so clearly promised with great and exceeding precious promises. The Hebrews writer hammers home this point as he elaborates upon Jesus' ministry in the heavens:

> [10] This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [11] No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. [12] For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (**Hebrews 8:10-12**).

Perhaps, one can say that Christ's sacrifice was consummated in heaven. As one reflects upon His death upon the cross, His ascension, His entrance into the sanctuary of God's presence, one quickly realizes that all of these acts constitute one redemptive act. Is it any wonder that Paul includes the "ascension" as one of the cardinal doctrines of the "Good News" of God's way of salvation? Again, what does it mean to say that He "was taken up in glory"? Frequently, Christians think too little of this marvelous and glorious event—the Lord's ascension. As one reflects upon His incarnation, one knows that that event is wonderful. When one ponders His temptation and His victory in the desert, one comes away with a feeling of wonderment. One can scarcely contemplate His resurrection from the grave without cognition of such a colossal happening. But there is a sense in which His ascension tops all these marvelous events in His life. One is catapulted, as it were, into the orbit of glory as one reflects upon all this majesty, this divinity, this power, and this glory as He passes through the heavens.

The pulpits of Christian churches today do not give sufficient attention to this majestic topic set forth in Holy Scripture. As one thinks about the life of Christ, one is immediately conscious of Jesus' rapture into glory as the consummation of all the wonders of redemption. When Christ became incarnate, He brought God down to mankind; but when he was "taken up in glory," He bore men and women up to God. Men and women can now approach the "throne of grace" (**Hebrews 4:16**). One should never forget that when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Paul calls this great doctrine of redemption to the attention of the Christians in Ephesus:

> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. [8] This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." [9] (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? [10] He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) [11] It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (**Ephesians 4:7-13**).

Every Christian is enriched today because of His ascension triumph. The author of Hebrews sheds light on this continuing ministry of Jesus in heaven as the "forerunner." He pens:

> This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil, [20]where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (**Hebrews 6:19-20**, NKJV).

This author draws upon the imagery of the tabernacle and the mediating work of the high priest in order to paint a graphic picture of the work of Jesus as the High Priest. Just as the high priest entered the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, so Jesus has entered the inner sanctuary on our behalf, which is heaven itself. In the author-preacher description of Jesus' continuing ministry, he speaks of Jesus as the "forerunner" (προψδρομö prodromos). Fred B. Craddock captures, in his excellent commentary on Hebrews, the full significance of the Greek word, which is translated "forerunner":

> The second affirmation in v. 20 about Jesus as high priest is that Jesus entered behind the veil into God's presence as a "forerunner" (προψδρομö prodromos). This is the only use of the word in the NT, although it occurs in the LXX and in Greek literature in various contexts: the runner out in front in an athletic event; a herald announcing the approach of an important person or group; a scout in advance of an army; or even the early fruit that promised the arrival of the harvest. In the culture of the tabernacle or Temple, the high priest was not a forerunner. No others, not even priests, followed him into the holy of holies; he went alone. By contrast, Christ, even though his salvific work of offering himself was peculiar to him alone, was a forerunner; that is, he prepared for others to follow. This interprets in part the third affirmation: Christ entered "on our behalf." Just as his earthly ministry of death on the cross was on our behalf, so also is his continuing ministry in God's presence, not solely as intercessor but as the one who makes possible our entry into the heavenly sanctuary.[3]

Unlike the high priest that ministered in the earthly tabernacle, Jesus, not only entered behind the curtain, but as "forerunner," He paved the way for others to enter behind the curtain—the Most Holy Place—that is to say, heaven itself. Everyone may now approach the "throne of grace" through the High Priest as "forerunner." The story of Jesus' ministry begins on earth, but it continues in heaven. Paul is saying, essentially the same thing that the author of Hebrews is writing, in Ephesians, as he explains, that Jesus ascended into heaven in victory and triumph and gave all kinds of gifts to certain individuals to prepare His community of believers for service. In His descent, He captured, as it were, captivity itself. Thus, he was able to lead "captives in his train" in His ascension. As a result of this ascension, He paved the way for humanity to approach the "throne of grace," that is, to enter behind the curtain that separated the Holy from the Most Holy. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God making intercession for each individual that seeks the mercy and grace of God. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the priests were not allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, only the high priest. Since the high priests in the earthly sanctuary were not "forerunners," then the priests could not enter the Most Holy, but now, all priests (every child of God) can follow Jesus.

The "throne of grace" is a beautiful and meaningful expression. This throne is designed to dispense mercy and pardon to the one who comes seeking forgiveness. One may approach this "throne of grace" because Jesus went through the heavens and is now seated at the right hand of God. The following words of the author of Hebrews should thrill one to his/her innermost being:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

This is what everyone needs—pardon. Even with pardon, one needs grace to keep one from sin, to aid one in his/her daily walk with God, and to strengthen one when temptations come knocking at one's door. Everyone is invited to freely approach the "throne of grace." Everyone needs this privilege of coming before the "throne of grace." What kind of a world would this be if God only sat upon a throne of justice? How dreadful this world would be if God exhibited no mercy. If these two things were true—strictly justice and no mercy—then one would be overwhelmed with despair. But this is not the case. Jesus is still exercising His ministry as High Priest (**4:14-16**—as cited above). Yes, everyone is sinful; everyone needs mercy; everyone is feeble; everyone needs grace to help in the time of need. The words of Jesus, as revealed to John on the island of Patmos, echo the sentiments of God's "throne of grace": "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (**Revelation 22:17**).

CONCLUSION

What does this hymn of praise mean to you? Do you want God to use you to proclaim this "mystery of devotion" in order to lead men and women to Him? Are you appreciative of what God has accomplished for the redemption of humanity? If not, then one cannot be an effective minister in God's kingdom. For one to be used by the Lord, one must first appreciate the Lord. Can you sing the words of David: "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD" (**Psalm 40:3**)?

As one looks back upon the crucifixion, one hears voices crying out: "Crucify him!" (**Matthew 27:22, 23**). But, on the other hand, one hears the echoes of jubilant singing by angels "numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand" (**Revelation 5:11**). Yes, men rejected Him, but heaven received Him—"was taken up in glory" (**1 Timothy 3:16**). If men and women are not pardoned, they alone suffer the blame. There is a "throne of grace." Jesus is always interceding. He is the Great High Priest of men and women. God accomplished redemption through His Son, Jesus:

> Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (**3:16**).

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] For an excellent discussion of the differentiation between the two phrases, see William Hendriksen, *I & II Timothy & Titus*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 137.

[3] Fred B. Craddock, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, in Leander E. Keck, Senior New Testament Editor, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, XII, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 82.

The One Mediator: Jesus Christ

Thrust Statement: **The Cross of Jesus is the Divine act of reconciliation for sinful men and women.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Timothy 2: 5-6**

One cannot reflect upon Christ as the One mediator (μεσιψτϊ mesiths) between God and humanity without a consciousness that the Cross of Jesus is the sign of the Christian faith and of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The words "He was pierced for our transgressions" (**Isaiah 53:5**) are the whole foundation upon which Christianity stands. It is this truth that makes Christianity distinctive from all other religions in the world. The message of the Cross is the central mystery of the Gospel of God (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). Paul, in writing to Timothy, says: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (**1 Timothy 2:5-6**).[1]

Paul, in his Epistles to the Ephesians, sought to explain this mystery of God—the One mediator between God and men—so that men and women might find hope. For the believer, the Cross is the divine act of reconciliation for sinful men and women. At the Cross of Jesus, one observes that the intellectual and moral pride of one trying to earn his or her salvation is finally broken in Him. Unless one understands the significance of the Cross of Jesus, one will never have the security of eternal life. The Cross of Jesus is a constant reminder of salvation by grace through faith. Paul tackles this priceless and glorious truth in his Ephesian Epistle as he seeks to unfold this mystery of God that had been hidden from ages past:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (**Ephesians 2:14-16**).

Jesus, the Mediator, is "our peace." It is through Jesus that God reconciles both Jew and Gentile unto Himself through the Cross. In the Cross of Jesus, one observes an actual objective transaction in the redemption of humanity. God does something that is absolutely essential for the salvation of both men and women. The starting point of Christianity is that God meets us in and through Jesus. Paul brings this truth home when he writes his second Epistle to the Corinthians: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). God reveals Himself in Christ, the Mediator between God and humanity. Timothy and Barbara Friberg and Neva Miller define, according to the Greek text, the word *mediator* as follows:

> Μεσιψτϊ (Mesiths), ου (ou), οΣ (&o) basically, a neutral and trusted person in the middle (μεΨσö mesos); (1) one who works to remove disagreement *mediator, go-between, reconciler* (1T 2.5); (2) one who provides a guarantee of fulfillment of contracted obligation *mediator* (HE 9.15).[2]

The words *mediator* or *arbitrator* speak of one who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement or to reach a common goal. The world religions do not accept Jesus as the Mediator between God and humanity. In a perusal of the world religions, one discovers that even though some accept belief in God, yet, at the same time, they deny the death of Jesus upon the Cross as a reconciling sacrifice. The message of Jesus Christ is incomprehensible to the world at large. Jesus came to deal with sin that affects man as well as God. When one violates God's Law, God's glory is at stake. Sin is an infringement of His glory. God's holiness is at stake. Thus, God's Divine punishment also proceeds from His holiness. One cannot rebel against God's Law with impunity.

God's holiness demands His wrath against sin. The Divine wrath of God must punish the sinner. Since everyone is guilty before God, this means that everyone falls under Divine condemnation. It is impossible for individuals to escape the consequences of his or her own actions on his or her own terms. One cannot pardon himself or herself. One's guilt is an inescapable necessity of punishment. God must maintain His holiness. The only way God could be just and, at the same time, the justifier of sinful humanity was/is through the atonement of Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for the violation of God's holiness. The biblical doctrine of the atonement (Christ dying upon the Cross) cannot be understood apart from the idea of God's holiness, His Divine wrath, and His Divine righteousness in punishment.

Whenever one confronts the Mediator (Jesus Christ) at the Cross, one perceives the Divine will to forgive, His holiness, and His wrath. The Cross of Jesus paints a picture of God's character—His wrath, His punishment, His love, and His forgiveness. The Cross of Christ is the place where one meets the loving, merciful, and forgiving God. It is in and through the Cross that one perceives God in all His holiness. A debt must be paid that lies outside all human possibilities. The death of Jesus is the cost and the price for humanity's sinfulness. In the death of Jesus one is confronted with the revelation of God's grace, the reality of His wrath, and the necessity of punishment for an affront against His holiness. In the Cross one is confronted with a paradox—God's wrath and His Divine love that blots out the sins of those who put their faith and trust

in the One Mediator, Jesus Christ, between God and man. This action of wrath and of love on the part of God is as big a mystery as is the mystery of the Triune God.

It is only in the Cross that the absolute holiness of God and His absolute mercy meet. Both God's holiness and God's mercy meet at the foot of the Cross. It is in the Cross that Law and love are brought together. Is it any wonder that Paul could write: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[c] 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**). It is in and through the Mediator that God descends and runs, as it were, after sinful humanity. As one approaches God through the Mediator, one is stripped completely naked of any goodness or works upon which one can stand before God justified; it is all of God.

Forgiveness cannot be subjective, that is to say, forgiveness is not just a matter of speaking; for example, God said, '"Let there be light,' and there was light" (**Genesis 1:3**). Forgiveness is not that easy, since sin is an affront to God's holiness. In Christianity, forgiveness is concretized in an historical event—the incarnation. It is in this vein that John writes: " The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**). There is a necessity of an objective atonement, not a subjective atonement. Paul develops this concept in his Roman Epistle. As he seeks to unfold salvation by grace through faith, he defends the necessity of an objective atonement in and through the incarnation of Christ:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

It is only in Christ that one is able to perceive the burden of guilt. God has revealed the forgiveness of sin in and through Jesus. John the Baptist expresses this truth with the following words: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29**)! It is through the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross that sin is taken away (**Isaiah 53**). Guilt is too great to be removed through simple forgiveness—"I forgive you." Before forgiveness can take place with God, something else must happen before forgiveness can become possible. The biblical doctrine of forgiveness is based upon the Atonement of Christ. Forgiveness of sins cannot be received through knowledge, exercise of the will, or through ritual acts, but only through the Jesus Christ. The Cross of Jesus is the sign of this revelation of forgiveness. Mark, in his Gospel, records the following words of Jesus to His disciples: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Mark 10:45**).

The reconciling revelation of God is the Mediator. This unique event—Incarnation—in history is none other than the eternal God who is beyond and above time. God takes the initiative (**John 3:16**); Christ humbles Himself (**Philippians 2:5-11**). One cannot look upon the Cross without a consciousness that God really comes to sinful humanity. The very essence of the Christian faith is to believe that in no one else is salvation (**Acts 4:12**); salvation can only be found in the One who is Mediator between God and humanity. This coming of Jesus breaks down the barriers that are opposed to forgiveness. It is only in Him that one can truly understand the Father as the God of love. It is only in and through Jesus that one can come to understand the phrase "guilt of sin" and the phrase "the forgiving love of God."

As one glances over time with the eye of faith and looks upon the Cross, one is immediately conscious that the Cross signifies substitutionary atonement. It is only through the Mediator that there is communing with the Divine life (**John 14:6**). It is through the miracle of divine revelation that God reveals His desire to have communion with both men and women. God wants communion with Dallas Burdette; God wants communion with Raymond Miller; God wants communion with Tim Bowen; God wants communion with Alton Bailey; in fact, God wants communion with every individual. Even before this universe was spoken into existence, God, according to Paul, "Chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesian 1:4**). How does one become a part of God's elect? Again, Paul zeros in on the essential fact that brings about this status: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**1:13**).

Without belief in the Mediator,[3] one cannot have communion with God. God wants to have communion with me; God wants to have communion with you. The Mediator's approach to humanity is not simply human solidarity, but rather the blending of the Divine and human in His Incarnation. His coming is the most unique event in the annals of the world. One observes in the blending of the Divine and the human elements in redemption the means whereby God justifies sinful humanity. The death of Jesus is an integral part of His vocation (**Mark 10:45; 8:31**). In the death of Jesus, one does not simply view death in the universal human sense but in the theocratic sense. In other words, it is the suffering of the Messiah, that is to say, the suffering of the Person—the God/Man—who can be none other than Himself—God become flesh (**John 1:1-14**). The vicarious offering (substitution for another) is something entirely personal. It is personal in the sense that this atonement sets forth the personality of the Mediator—One who acts vicariously[4] for both man and God.

What does it mean to say that the Mediator acts vicariously for both man and God? God's nature is revealed in His Son (**John 14:6-9**). It is in Jesus that the love of God breaks through His wrath. It is only in Christ that God can extend His love without endangering His holiness (**Romans 3:21-26**). In Jesus one witnesses the revealed love of God. It is only in Christ that one experiences the forgiveness of sins (**Colossians 1:14**). One who does not believe in Jesus is under God's wrath (**John 3:18**). The very essence of the Christian faith is to believe that salvation is found in no one else (**Acts 4:12**). It is also essential to believe that this suffering of the Messiah upon the Cross as an atonement happened only once (**Hebrews 9:26**). God takes the

initiative in the salvation of humanity (**John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19**). It is in the Cross that God comes to humanity. There is a sense in which one might say that the Cross is the total expression of His life.

Jesus is the only One who can reconcile humanity to God. How? In the Incarnation, Jesus identifies Himself wholly with man, but, at the same time, He is absolutely united to God (**John 1:1-3**). He is the only One to whom this task of redemption could be assigned. Why? The answer is found in the fact that Jesus is God, the Unique Savior. Since Jesus is one with God, this constitutes the basis of His solidarity with man (**Hebrew 2:14-18; 1 John 4:9-10; 1 Timothy 3:16**). Without the Mediator, one is not stripped entirely naked. One does not sense the guilt of sin. Christianity is unlike the religions of the world. In Christianity, God descends and runs after humanity. One can never deal with guilt apart from the intervention of God—sending His Son for the sins of the world.

Since sin is an injury done to God Himself, God provides the expiatory sacrifice, not man. If one rejects the idea of God's wrath, one must of necessity reject His love. The world, as a whole, recognizes the need for expiatory sacrifice. Until one recognizes that he or she stands naked before God, one will not seek God's forgiveness through His Mediator. Since humanity rebelled against God, God offered a divine sacrifice that is offered only once—His Son (**Hebrew 9:26**). One cannot live without God, but one cannot live with God so long as one's guilt is not atoned for, that is to say, expiated through the Cross of Christ (**Romans 3:9-23**). One cannot stand in the presence of God's holiness without a change of garments—the righteousness of God. God's wisdom consists in the means whereby He could accomplish the impossible, so it seemed to mortal man and the angels. Paul describes God's wisdom of redemption this way:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b]—(**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

God alone can make this sacrifice. It is God who does it. It is God who suffers. It is God who takes the burden upon Himself. Sin is no illusion. Wrath is no illusion. In the New Testament, one discovers that the Cross of Christ is the self-offering of God. God alone is the One who can "cover" sin as though it had never been. It is God who takes everything upon Himself. Since God is holy, something must take place in order that the past may be completely obliterated. This disharmony cannot simply be removed by God's love, because the love of God is holy. God is not only the Merciful One, but He is also the Holy One. In the sacrifice of Jesus, one sees the mercy and holiness of God expressed in all its fullness. In the crucifixion of Jesus, one witnesses an historical event—a real concrete historical event. Whoever rejects the Atonement of Christ remains severed from the God of love. In the Gospel of God, one observes the gulf between humanity and God removed. In the Gospel, one observes a real movement—an event that shows the seriousness of humanity's condition and the unspeakable wonder of God's love.

CONCLUSION

This self-movement of God began before the creation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). This is the theme of the Old Testament from beginning to end (**Luke 24:44- 49**). The Mediator that Paul speaks of in his **First Epistle to Timothy** (**2:5-6**) is the One that the Prophets foretold. Jesus came in order to deliver those who put their faith in Him. Without Jesus, one is still under God's wrath. This disposition of God's wrath was/is caused by the rupture of communion with Him through sin. God takes sin seriously. "God cannot be mocked," writes the apostle Paul (**Galatians 6:7**). As a result of humanity's attitude toward sin, this action produced a change in God's attitude toward sinful humanity. If God had not taken action against rebellion, this unconcern would indicate that God does not love. In other words, God's unconcern would mean that God is mocked. If God had not taken His own command and will seriously, this would indicate that God is not unyielding, unbendable, and not reliable. The wrath of God is God taking Himself seriously and humanity seriously. The wrath of God is a necessary expression of God's reaction to revolt.

The one who refuses to entertain God's wrath, God's judgment, and God's condemnation will never take Jesus the Mediator seriously. Out of God's holiness springs His wrath. Out of God's holiness comes the necessity of judgment and punishment for one who turns his back upon Him. It is only in and through Jesus that the breach can be restored between God and humanity. Jesus views His whole life as a divine act of forgiveness: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (**Luke 19:10**). The last phase of the Incarnation is found in the Cross of Christ and the message of atonement in and through Jesus. The Cross demonstrates to sinners the holiness of God together with His mercy. Guilt is a reality even for God. God reacted to this guilt by sending Jesus as the Mediator, the Savior of the world. In the Philippian letter, Paul reveals God's coming down to man in the Incarnation. One can say that God's wrath is an effect of His holiness. It is God's love that leads to the Cross of the Savior.

If one wishes eternal life, one must overcome self-righteousness. This kind of mentality can only be overcome through the message of reconciling death of Jesus upon Calvary. The doctrine of the Cross and justification by faith is the very heart of the message of salvation. One can only live by God's grace, not one's own works of righteousness. Do you want forgiveness? Do you want a relationship with God? Do you want eternal life? If so, this can only be found in Jesus, God's Mediator between God and men. It is in Jesus that one observes the coming of the kingdom of God and of a new covenant, a covenant in which God will not remember sins any longer (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). As you reflect upon the Cross, do you stand in awe of God's matchless love, His unfathomable mercy, and His perfect holiness? Are you willing to accept Jesus as God's Mediator? Jeremiah tells the "fact" of forgiveness, but Paul tells the "how" of forgiveness (**Romans 3:21-26**).

In conclusion, the following Scripture citations are given to call attention to the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ in His bridging the gap between God and humanity:

> For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. [7] And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and

an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (**1 Timothy 2:5-7**).

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6**).

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (**Hebrews 9:15**).

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (**Hebrews 12:22-24**).

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (**Romans 10:1-4**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. Vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 259.

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God~s mystery*

d Or *the Only Begotten*

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[3] One who mediates, especially one who serves as an intermediary to reconcile differences.

[4] Acting in place of someone or something else.

b Jer. 9:24

The Purpose of the Church in God's Scheme of Redemption

Thrust Statement: **The Church is God's appointed seat of His presence with men and women**

Scripture Reading: **1 Timothy 3:14-16**

Many individuals who profess faith in God and Christ see no relevance for the Church for which Jesus died. As a result of this mindset, numerous Christians often live their lives in isolation from the Church that God ordained for the spread of His message of salvation by grace through faith in the atonement of Christ. It is not uncommon for individuals to identify the Church as an ecclesiastical organization rather than as the fellowship of Jesus Christ or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, modern men and women have outgrown their need for the Church of Jesus the Messiah? As one seeks to understand the place of the Church in the lives of God's people, every believer is confronted with many questions. For instance, why did God found the Church? Again, what is the purpose of God's new community of believers? What is the Church? Is the Church visible or invisible? What constitutes the Church? Is the word *church* employed in the New Testament in the same way that many Christians today utilize the term? Is the Church simply an ecclesiastical institution? Or is the Church in the New Testament writings the fellowship of Christian believers?

These are questions that one ought to approach in seeking to understand what the Church is. Positively, one can declare that the Church is the fellowship of Jesus Christ? One can also state that the Church is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, one can say, "there is the Christian communion." Within the Body of Christ, the faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Church is simply composed of those who have a relationship with God through Christ. Within the Body of Christ, all Christians have one thing in common, namely, God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Where the Spirit is, there is the Christian communion. The Church of the New Testament is simply the fellowship of Christian believers who have been purchased by the blood of Christ.

The Church of Jesus is not an "it," it is not "a thing," nor is it an "institution." But rather, it is a unity of persons. The Church is people, that is to say, it is a

communion of individuals who have responded to Jesus as Lord in their lives. Many expressions are utilized to express the very heart of the word *church*—the Israel of God, the seed of Abraham, the elect of God, the kingdom of God, the assembly, and so on. Unfortunately, many Christians read into "church of the living God" (ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος, ekklhsia qeou zwntos) [**1 Timothy 3:15**] the image of the institutional church as it has developed within their own world of traditions handed down from their forefathers. Emil Brunner is forthright in his description of the church of Jesus: "The *Ecclesia* of Jesus Christ is God's people, the elect people—that was also the rightful description of Israel."[1] The Church is fundamentally a fellowship of persons and not an institution, that is, an ecclesiastical organization.

This essay focuses upon the positive (biblical) understanding of the meaning of the English word *church*. The positive emphasis should enhance one's appreciation for the wonder and beauty of what God brought into being through the death of Jesus upon the Cross. What is the purpose of the Church in God's scheme of redemption? Paul expresses to Timothy the true nature of the Church and its mission. Listen to Paul as he sets forth God's objective for His new community of believers:

> Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household (οἴκῳ θεοῦ, oikw qeou), which is the church of the living God (ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος, ekklhsia qeou zwntos), the pillar and foundation (ἑδραίωμα, Jedraiwma, "bulwark")) of the truth. 16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He[c] appeared in a body,[d] was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (**1 Timothy 3:14-16**)[2]

How did Paul view the Church? He spoke of the church as "God's household" (**3:15**), which is the same as saying that the Church is God's family. What is the purpose of the family or church? An answer to this question should increase one's gratitude of God's wisdom in creating a body of believers to continue the preaching of God's way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Paul also addresses the intent, or aim, of the Church by calling attention to God's family unit as the "pillar and foundation" of the truth, which truth is none other than the Gospel. E. F. Scott is on target when he writes:

> He has ordained the Church as **the pillar and bulwark of the Truth**, i. e. of the gospel, in which He has revealed Himself. The word translated **bulwark** means literally 'something to rest on,' and is commonly used for a basis or foundation. [3]

Paul defines this "pillar and bulwark of the truth" by calling awareness to the "mystery of godliness." What is this "mystery of godliness" that the church, as declared by Paul, is spoken of as the "pillar and the foundation of truth" (NIV)? It is Jesus! Pay attention to Paul as he explains: "He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (**3:16**).[4] For Paul, the Church builds its faith upon the Lordship of Christ, which he sets forth in his magnificent and breathtaking hymn.

In this hymn, Paul speaks of the virgin birth of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus, angels ministering unto Him, proclamation of Jesus as the Savior of the world, many believing on Him, and His ascension. The Gospel is about Jesus. The Church exists to make known this truth. Paul writes to the Galatians about the departure of some from this reality of God's redemption—justification by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (**Galatians 1:6-9**)

The word *gospel* like the word *church* often receives a definition that is based upon one's own distinctive fellowship, not according to the Scriptures. Prior to Paul's denunciation of those who perverted the Gospel, he defined the Gospel in **1:4**: "Who gave himself for our sins." It is this truth that the Church is to maintain. Paul defended this Gospel by saying: "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (**1:15**). After his conversion, Paul reveals a visit to Jerusalem in which he says that he "set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles" (**2:2**). The Gospel focused upon how one is put in a right relationship with God. Again, Paul jots down:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (**2:15-16**)

The Book of Galatians is a book about how one is justified before God. In defense of justification by faith, Paul calls forth Abraham (b. 2166 BC) to explain the Gospel in its fullness: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (**3:8-9**). Again, he puts pen to paper: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,'[a] meaning one person, who is Christ" (**3:16**).

This "mystery of godliness" is unfolded in great detail in the Book of Ephesians. Paul employs the word *mystery* (μυστήριον, musthrion) seven times in this short Epistle.[5] This mystery is none other than Christ Himself. In fact, Paul, in the Book of Colossians, states emphatically that this "mystery" is Christ:

> Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which

is the church. [25] I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the **mystery of God**, namely, **Christ**. (**Colossians 1:24—2:3**)

In **Ephesians 1:3-14**, Paul briefly unfolds the "mystery of godliness." He begins his comments with this startling statement: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world" (**1:4**). This "mystery" is completely unique in the annals of history. Christianity is absolutely unique among the religions of the world. It has a history before its actual history commenced—a life before its birth. Paul calls this "mystery" the "mystery of his will" in **1:9**. In chapter three, he also writes of this mystery as "the mystery" (**3:3**), "the mystery of Christ" (**3:4**), "this mystery that is through the gospel" (**3:6**), and finally, "the administration of this mystery" (**3:9**). As stated above, in the Colossian Epistle, Paul says plainly, "This mystery, which is Christ in you" (**Colossians 1:27**). In **Ephesian 6: 19**, Paul requests prayers for strength to fearlessly proclaim Jesus as God's way of salvation: "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." In the third chapter of Ephesians, Paul discloses the purpose of the Church in God's scheme of redemption:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10] His intent was that now, through the church (διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, dia ths ekklhsias), the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. [13] I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (**3:7-13**)

What is this "manifold wisdom of God" about? Paul discloses this "wisdom" in his first Corinthian correspondence. How could God be just and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity. Paul discloses how God was able to accomplish this act and remain just. Listen to Paul as he speaks of God's wisdom, which wisdom had been kept hidden from the foundation of the world: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness,

holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). God in His wisdom made Jesus "our righteousness, holiness and redemption." It is through the family of God that this information is communicated to a lost and dying world. Even the angels did not understand how God would redeem sinful humanity. Peter addresses this subject of the angels and their desire to know how God would justify sinful humanity in his first epistle to God's elect by writing: "Even angels long to look into these things" (**1 Peter 1:12**).

How can Christians in good conscious disassociate themselves from God's family, which family is commanded to spread the Good News of salvation by grace in and through Jesus? One does not read in the New Testament of the concept of "apartness" from God's family. Christians are not to live their lives in isolation from His kingdom. The Church, as a whole, is to tell the story of redemption initiated by God and accomplished by Christ with the sealing by the Holy Spirit on those who believe. The Good News is that God loves the human race in spite of what they are. Emil Brunner writes: "The cross of Christ is the point where God's love meets sinful man, if the sinful man, also, stands there, that is by faith."[6] The Good News is that God's act in Christ gives men and women a new standing. It goes without saying that individuals cannot forgive themselves; forgiveness is His prerogative alone. God forgives! But, at the same time, He does it in such a way that it becomes clear to the one forgiven as to how seriously God takes guilt into consideration. God takes away guilt through the Cross. Paul explains this paradox of justice and forgiveness this way:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (**Romans 3:21-26**)

The Church is to continue to tell the story of how "God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement." Is God's Church important in your daily walk with Him. In Paul's final farewell to the leaders (elders) from Ephesus, he speaks of the Church as significant: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God (ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ekklhsian tou qeou), which he bought with his own blood" (**Acts 20:28**). If the Church is purchased with the "blood" of God, can one treat the Church with contempt, dislike, or disrespect? Again, the author of Hebrews speaks of the Church in glowing terms:

> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn (ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων, ekklhsia prwtotokwn, "church of firstborn ones"), whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of

> righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (**Hebrews 12:22-24**)

Just a cursory glance of Holy Scripture reveals the importance of the Church in the lives of God's people. Prior to the author's reference to the "church of the firstborn," or "church of the firstborn ones," he admonished Christians to not abandon the assembly: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. [25] Let us not give up meeting together (ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, episunagwghn Jeautwn, "coming together of ourselves"), as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (**10:24-25**).

Even in the face of daily danger, they were told not to give up the habit of meeting together. Immediately, upon the heels of what he just wrote, he cautions these Christians to consider carefully their standing before God: "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (**10:29**). Are you trampling under foot the Son of God? Do you treat the covenant blood as an unholy thing? Are you insulting the Spirit of grace? Not only are Christians exhorted not to abandon the habit of meeting together, but they are also taught to be holy: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (**12:14-15**). The family of God should be living in such a way that the love of God is reflected in the light of the lives of His saints. Peter, too, deals with the relevance of the Church in his first Epistle. He writes:

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— [5] you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (**1 Peter 2:4-6**)

Christians are "living stones" within the family of God. Christians are also "being built into a spiritual house." God's elect constitutes a "holy priesthood," which priests are to offer spiritual sacrifices. Again, he writes down the very purpose of those who belong to God's people:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (**2:8-10**)

Peter says essentially the same thing that Paul expresses in his Epistle to the Ephesians. By Christians declaring the praises of God for redemption, one is fulfilling the intent of his or her part in God's household. God's intent was and is that His manifold wisdom should be made known to the world through His Church or community of believers. Unfortunately today, the common foundation for many churches is not Jesus, but rather their own brand of orthodoxy, which orthodoxy they identity as the so-called "true

church." The foundation for God's new community, or Church, has been laid, and the starting point is Jesus. Christians need to recapture the essence of God's Church, which consists of people, not an ecclesiastical organization. If the Church is to capture the world for Christ, there must be a reflection upon the common calling—the forces of κοινωνία (koinwnia, "fellowship, a close mutual relationship, sharing in"). Christians need to cross over denominational barriers and return to the New Testament concept of solidarity, which is expressed by Paul in his second Epistle to Corinth. He writes: "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (**2 Corinthians 11:28**).

The collective body of God's people is called the Church, or ἐκκλησία (ekklhsia, "assembly" or "congregation"). In **Romans 16:1**, Paul speaks of the church in Cenchrea, which is an assembly of God's people in Cenchrea. Then he speaks of "all the churches of the Gentiles" [ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν, ekklhsiai twn eqnwn] (**16:4**). He also spoke of "the church" in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (**16:5**). In **16:16**, he spoke of the "churches of Christ" (ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ekklhsiai tou Cristou). The expression "churches of Christ" is no more the name of the church than the expression, "churches of the Gentiles." Paul begins his first Corinthian correspondence with: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (**1 Corinthians 1:2**, KJV). The Book of Galatians begins with the phrase: "To the churches in Galatia" (**Galatians 1:2**). Also, in this same chapter, Paul refers to "the churches of Judea that are in Christ" (**1:22**). In the Ephesian Epistle, he begins with: "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (**Ephesians 1:1**). As Paul closes his Epistle to the Philippians, he writes: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (**Colossians 4:16**). To the Thessalonians: "To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**1Thessalonians 1:1**).

The English word *church* is more accurately translated as "assembly." Peter calls the assemblies of Christ "God's elect" (**1 Peter 1:1**). The Book of Revelation also addresses "seven churches in the Province of Asia" (**Revelation 1:4**). The elect of God exists in various local assemblies. Christians, to some extent, are stuck with the English word *church*. Unfortunately, the Reformers were baptized Catholics. As a result of this mindset, there was not a total new beginning, but a slight cleansing of some issues. The Protestant Movement failed in its identification of "church" and "ekklhsia." This failure in identification resulted in divisions within the Body of Christ. Christians isolated themselves from other Christians. Each isolated body identified itself as the "true church." Emil Brunner goes right to the heart of this misconception: "The isolationist tendency hostile to co-operation, arises precisely from the false opinion that a particular church is the true *Ecclesia*, the legitimate heir of the Christian fellowship of the New Testament."[7]

Christians need to recapture the spirit of koinwnia, or communion, of His Body. Koinwnia should lead to a common proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and to a common action in the Church and in the world. This unity of purpose is set forth in the Lord's Supper. This unity is the unity for which Jesus prayed (**John 17**). This unity is a world-embracing unity—to all who believe in His name. Everyone who is called of

God is a part of this "fellowship of the Spirit." Paul writes to the Philippians about this koinwnia:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit (κοινωνία πνεύματος, koinwnia pneumatos), if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (**Philippians 2:1-4**)

Christians participate in a particular history—the act of salvation, the life giving activity of the Holy Spirit. When believers reject God's new community, they reject the life giving activity of the Holy Spirit. Life for the believer is a constant sharing with each other. God calls individuals into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Paul expresses it this way: "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son (κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, koinwnian tou Juiou autou) Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful" (**1 Corinthians 1:9**). To those who responded to Jesus in repentance and baptism were added to the 3000 who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost. Luke writes: "Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (**Acts 2:47**). The saved met on a daily basis in the temple courts (**2:46**). In this same context, Luke records: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (**2: 42**). The KJV translates **Acts 2:47**: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The NIV translates this passage: "Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." The English word *church* is not in the Greek text. The Greek text simply reads: "And the Lord added the ones being save (τοὺς σῳζομένους, tous swzomenous, "the ones being saved") from day to day together (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, epi to auto, "together")." Those who responded to the Good News of God were added to the elect of God, not to a particular denomination.

When one speaks of the Church today, one should be conscious that God's family repeats the early testimony of the Body of Christ—Christ was Crucified and Resurrected and is Head of His family. The early Church did not venerate the body of a dead Jew, but they did worship the body of a risen Lord. The Church wants to know Christ and the power of His Resurrection. The Church has always been made up of fallible and ordinary people—people saved by grace. For the believer, the Church is still the most important single phenomenon that human history has to show. The existing Body of Christ testifies to the authenticity of Christianity. When one repudiates the Church, one ignores the fact that one, too, is a part of the Church. It is in Christ that one escapes the jungle of individualism.

The community of Christ is God's gift to humanity. The Church of Jesus is a radically new fellowship. The new people of God represent the new humanity—a people separated for God's service. It is in and through the Church that individuals are reminded that one is not his or her own. Within the Body of Christ, one is consciously

aware of the reality of God's redemption through the observance of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. When Christians gather to hear the Word of God preached, this hearing of the word helps one to renew his or her life. Why do Christians assemble? They assemble in response to God's act of redemption in the gift of His Son. When Christians gather to express their worship in a corporate setting, one draws reality and depth from this gathering of God's people. Every assembly of God's people should be a time where the barricade of race, nationality, class, sex, and education are done away. This get-together should be a place where the needy, the browbeaten, the outcast, and the unloved find a welcome and feel themselves at home. This meeting should be a place where individuals find support and encouragement.

With the coming of Jesus, one witnesses the breaking in of a new age in which Jesus creates a new ekklhsia. The Church is the New Jerusalem, the New Heaven and Earth, and the Elect of God. When God adds to His Body of believers, the faithful share in a new life. It is not possible for individuals to go on living in the old way when they have come fact to face with the Kingdom of God. As one reflects upon the New Israel of God, one is conscious of pure grace on the part of God. The Church consists of those set apart to be holy and to serve God. The Church does not allow for individualism, but fellowship. This essay is written to help individuals to rediscover the Church as the New People of God. W. A. Vissr't Hooft and J. H. Oldham address the problem of division within the Body of Christ today with its various denominations. They capture the very heart of the matter: "All agree that there is essentially only *one* Church, since there is only one Lord. As a reality of faith, the word Church has no plural."[8] This concept is very difficult for many Christians, especially since they identify their particular church as the Church or the Lord's Church. Once more, Hooft and Oldham focus on the heart of the issue when they write:

If it is said that there is only one Church, this implies for some Churches that only one visible Church is the true Church, but for others that no visible Church can claim to be *the* Church of Christ, since all Christian Churches together represent that reality. These examples might be multiplied *ad infinitum*; but the point is clear, namely, that our belief in the Church is both the basis which enables us to meet together, and at the same time the barrier which makes us unable to speak with a united voice.[9]

Unfortunately, for many, the Church often conveys the belief that in order for one to be a Christian, he or she must hold to the doctrinal formulation of a certain fellowship of God's people. What makes an individual one is not his or her adherence to certain doctrinal issues, but rather that one has been reconciled to God through Christ. The Church is a Christian community, that is to say, a fellowship of persons living together. Yet again, Hooft captures the very essence of what the Church is and its mission: "The Church is the community which has been gathered and mobilized by the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill that part of the plan of God which must be fulfilled in the final period of History."[10] Christians are called into koinwnia, which koinwnia is in Christ. Every local Assembly of God's people should have one goal—the proclamation of the Gospel.

As stated earlier, when Christians assemble to partake of the Lord's Supper, this meal should be a constant reminder of unity among God's people. Unity is found

in none other than Jesus of Nazareth. In spite of the divisions existing among God's people, God does not recognize the existence of parties or separated churches. Even with differences within the various communities of God's people, Christians still belong to the one and only people of God. When churches are characterized by self-centered denominationalism and institutionalism, God is not pleased. What is the calling of the Church? It is to fulfill the mission of spreading the Gospel of God, which Gospel has been entrusted to the Church. Christians are united because they all share in one common calling. Unity in the early Church included all who called upon the name of Christ. Does the Good News of God's Way of salvation still radiate from your face? Is there little warmth in your heart for God's community of Resurrection? Every believer should wrap himself or herself up in the grace of God in and through Jesus. What does the Church mean to you? Christians should never forget that from the very beginning of the Day of Pentecost, the Christian community was a missionary society.

If one wishes to become more and more like God, one must allow the community of Resurrection to become a part one one's life. In God's blueprint for His people, one realizes that Jesus Christ and His kingdom are God's blueprint for His children. The Church calls attention to the fact that Jesus cried from the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (ἠλὶ ἠλὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι, hli hli lema sabacqani) in order to keep us from crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:45**).[11] Should Christians dispense with the Church? No! The Church exists for the sake of the world. The congregation is intended to be missionary in purpose and missionary in design. Every Church should adopt a "GO" theology, not a "COME" theology. The negative "wait" and "let come" is the very opposite of what Jesus taught His followers. Christians come together in order that they might "GO."

CONCLUSION

As one reflects upon the Church in one's life, one must ask himself or herself, what does life under the Cross of Christ mean to me? One can say that one's life under the Gospel is the opening of one's heart to Christ Jesus. Is Christ, first in your life? This opening of one's life to Christ enables one to bring forth fruits that result in God's glory. When one allows God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit the right-of-way in one's life, then this individual maintains consciousness of God's Good News who makes oneself available to be a channel that portrays His kingdom with a view of welcoming the fullness of God's glory. Again, what does the Church mean to you? What does it mean to assemble with the saints during the week? Unfortunately, many Christians abandon the assembling of themselves with other believers. Yet, a life under the Gospel is a life that is active in the Church. Life in the Christian community is not only something between Christ and the individual, but it is also life in the Body of Christ. In other words, if one acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord in one's existence, this acknowledgement involves one's sharing his or her faith with others.

To be a Christian means to be incorporated into the Body of Christ. The Church is the fellowship whereby the Gospel of God continues to be proclaimed throughout the world. Every individual is nourished through the Church. As one witnesses Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, one is constantly reminded of one's life under the Gospel. One should keep in mind that life in the Church is not isolationism. Christians should identify themselves with other believers. Have you discarded the

need for the Church in your way of life? One should never forget that the function of the internal life of the Church is to enable Christians to grow together in the Body of Christ. Jesus purchased the Church with His blood. The ultimate authority for the Church is found in the authority of God in His Revelation. Also, it is through the proclamation of the Good News of God that one discovers the function of the Church in society. Out of the Good News of God, one discovers the kingdom foretold by the prophets (**Daniel 2, Isaiah 2, Joel 2**).

One can say that the Gospel brought the Church into being and still keeps the Church in obedience to God. If the Church wishes to be a witness to the world, it must again and again search the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for those Scriptures that testify about Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. If the Church is unimportant, one wonders why the Holy Spirit wrote: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (**Acts 2:47**). As one thinks about the significance of the Church in God's scheme of redemption, one needs to be conscious that the essence of the new community of Christ, or Church, is the oneness of communion with Christ by faith and brotherhood in love. The Church is a spiritual organism, not an ecclesiastical organization. It is people. It is the elect of God. It is the community of God. It is the New Israel of God. Christ created a spiritual communion of persons redeemed by His blood, not a religious or clerical corporation. The body of Christ is responsible for proclaiming Jesus as the Mediator between God and humanity. It is in this vein that Paul writes:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1**)

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[1] Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 19.

[c] Some manuscripts *God*

[d] Or *in the flesh*

[2] All Scripture citations are from *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[3] E. F. Scott, The Pastoral Epistles, in James Moffatt, ed., *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1936), 39.

[4] For a detailed study of **First Timothy 3:16**, see Dallas Burdette, "Mystery of Godliness" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 1 January 2007], located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading CHRISTMAS (BIRTH OF CHRIST).

[b]Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

[a]Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

[5] 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 619.

[b]Jer. 9:24

[6] Emil Brunner, *Faith, Hope, and Love* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 20.

[a]25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[7] Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 113.

[8] Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft and Dr. J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its function in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1937, 1938), 89.

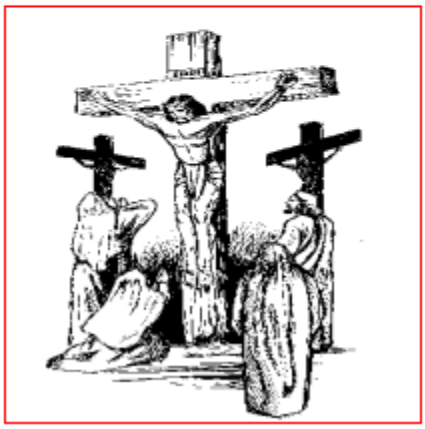
[9] Ibid., 90.

[10] W. A. Visser't Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1959), 36.

[11] I am indebted to Emil Brunner, *I believe in the Living God* , 82-83, for this insight.

[a]Or *be a sin offering*

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified



Thrust Statement: **God's people should determine not to know anything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 6:14**

As one reflects upon his/her salvation, one cannot help but recall the cross of Jesus Christ. Without the cross of Christ, one would find himself/herself in utter despair. Since everyone has sinned, every individual is under the wrath of God unless one comes under the cross of Christ. It was upon the cross that Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of mankind. It was upon the cross that God the Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all. It was upon the cross that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. It was upon the cross that Jesus was crushed for our iniquities. It was upon the cross that Jesus justified many. It was upon the cross that Jesus brought us peace.

Paul, in his first letter to Corinth (ca. 54/56 CE), calls attention to the priority of the cross in his preaching. He goes right to the heart of the Gospel when he writes: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:2**). After Paul's first missionary journey, he wrote to the churches in the province of Galatia (ca. 48 CE) concerning the cross of Jesus: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**Galatians 6:14**).[1]

Some Christians were not relying upon the "finished" work of Christ for salvation. This mindset was not something unique to the first century; it is still prevalent within the twenty-first century. Many Christians today still labor under the impression that it is one's works that puts one in a right relationship with God. It is not uncommon for Christians to rely not upon the finished work of Christ, but rather upon

their own good works. Is it any wonder that Paul, in writing to the Ephesians (60 CE), calls attention to God's grace manifested in and through Jesus: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**).

Do you glory in the cross of Christ? Or do you glory in your own works? Did you receive salvation through the cross of Christ or through your own efforts? Did you receive the Spirit of God through your obedience to God's law, or did you receive the Spirit through faith? Are you a child of God through faith, or are you a child of God through law keeping? Are you glorying in the cross of Christ, or are you glorying in your own efforts? Is salvation from God? Or is salvation from you? If you are glorying in your own efforts, you are denying justification by faith. In other words, you are in reality denying the purpose of the cross of Christ. Paul captures graphically the nature of salvation when he says,

Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:24-26**).

The cross was an outstanding victory over Satan, death, and condemnation. As the people of God, every believer should live his/her daily life with a sensitive awareness of Christ's cross. Are you living in sin as your way of life? Have you put to death the sins of your flesh? Are you looking to Jesus for salvation? Do you understand that it is only through His blood shed upon the cross that you can enjoy fellowship with God? Paul points out the significance of the cross and the blood to the Colossians (60 CE):

> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (**Colossians 1:19-20**).

It is through the shed blood of Jesus upon the cross that God has brought about peace for sinful humanity. In astonishment Paul cries out: "For he himself is our peace" (**Ephesians 2:14**). Again, he writes: "For through him we both have access to the Father by One Spirit" (**2:18**). Is it incredulous that Paul stands in awe, as it were, at glorying at anything other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**Galatians 6:14**).

ONE MUST GLORY IN THE PERSON OF THE CROSS

The author of Hebrews encourages the disciples of Jesus to fix their eyes on Him who is the source of salvation. Are your eyes fixed on Jesus or are your eyes fixed on your own works? The author of Hebrews calls attention to the necessity of fixing one's eyes upon the One who is the author and perfecter of one's faith. Listen to this writer as he zeros in on Him who is the author of eternal life:

> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (**Hebrews 12:2-3**).

Once more, the words of Paul ring loud and clear: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). Do you praise God for what Jesus did upon the cross? Do you ever contemplate upon the miracle of it all? The heavenly host does! If one wants to really understand the magnitude of this event upon the cross, one should reflect upon the words of John (ca 68 BC) as he describes the vision and admiration of the heavenly host. For just a moment, take the time to eavesdrop on a scene that took place in heaven with the twenty-four elders who fell down before the Lamb of God in praise:

> And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (**Revelation 5:9-10**).

The twenty-four elders sang a new song about the blood of Jesus. Yes, he was slain (crucified) and purchased men for God through His shed blood. This adoration did not stop just with the twenty-four elders, but John tells his readers that this praise came from thousands upon thousands as they reflected upon the unfathomable riches of God's grace in offering Jesus for the sins of the world. Yet again, listen to John as he seeks to capture the praise extended to the One who died upon the cross for the sins of humanity:

> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped (**Revelation 5:11-14**).

Do you sing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain"? Do you glory in the cross of Jesus? There is a sense in which one can never know His Lord Jesus Christ without the cross. The penal aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus is the essence of the gospel. Peter says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (**1 Peter 2:24**). Have you died to sins? Are you now living for righteousness? Has the cross of Jesus made a difference in your lifestyle? What does this grace really mean to you? Has grace changed your way of living? Paul tells Titus:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-

> controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (**Titus 2:12-14**).

The cross of Christ should change the behavior of every man and woman who responds to the "good news" of salvation made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus as atonement for the sins of humanity. This sacrifice of Jesus is so important that Paul reminds the Corinthians not to forget the gospel—death, burial, and resurrection—he proclaimed to them:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**).

Paul wanted them to know that Jesus had to die, "for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (**Hebrews 9:22**). Christ's death upon the cross was not an afterthought on the part of God. Peter on the day of Pentecost acknowledged the foreordination of this redeeming event: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (**Acts 2:23**). On the day of the resurrection, the women who had previously followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (**Luke 23:55**) visited the tomb of Jesus only to be questioned by "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" (**24:4**). These two men said: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Then they remembered his words" (**24:5-8**).

Following a squabble between the apostles over the request of James and John for positions of honor (**Mark 10:35-41**), Jesus reminds them all: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**10:45**). There was sovereignty about His death, for He chose the manner of His death and unfolded it to His disciples. He knew He was going to die. Matthew records three separate occasions **(Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**) in which Jesus foretold about His death and resurrection on the third day. In His last Passover meal with the disciples, He explains to His disciples that the third cup (The Cup of Blessing) represented His shed blood: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**).

As one recalls the Passover meal in which Jesus instituted His own meal as a memorial, one can hardly mull over the words "my blood" and "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" without reflection upon the words of the Holy Spirit revealed to Isaiah (739 BCE) concerning this event of Christ's sacrifice. Isaiah 53 is one of the most profound prophesies in the Old Testament that describes the import of

the death of Christ for the world. Listen to Isaiah as he describes the benefits from the crucifixion:

> He was despised, and we esteemed him not. [4] Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. [6] We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. [8] By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. [9] He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. [10] Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. [11] After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:4-12**).

Is it any wonder that everyone should boast only in the "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"? When one thinks about the following statements, one can only stand in awe at the unsearchable riches of Christ: "The LORD makes his life a guilt offering," "My righteous servant will justify many," "He will bear their iniquities," and "He bore the sins, and made intercession for the transgressors." Yes, these pregnant clauses set forth the substitutionary atonement of Jesus—"the LORD makes his life a guilt offering" (**Isaiah 53:10**). No wonder Paul shouts: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). Do you not understand why Paul dared not boast about his salvation except in the cross of Christ? It is as Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). Again, Paul writes, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (**3:25**). Jesus died to become your Savior. I remind each of you, "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men**" (1 Timothy 2:5-6**).

Once more, Paul's words are to the point: "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Can you brag about your works? Do you think that your works have put you in a right relationship with God? Listen all over again as Paul nails the coffin shut about "works righteousness": "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith" (**3:27**). Paul emphatically states: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:28**).

CONCLUSION

What does the cross mean to you? Does it exclude your boasting about your salvation through your own merits? You would never know salvation from the penalty of sin were it not for the fact that Jesus died at Calvary. Have you knelt at Calvary and said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). Where do you stand? Remember that the glory of the cross is the glory of His person, His purpose, and His power. Will you look at that cross and beyond it to Christ and give your answer? Do you praise God as the twenty-four elders praised God in their contemplation of the One slain from the foundation of the world? Do you too join in praise with the heavenly host—ten thousand times ten thousand? The song written by Isaac Watts (1674-1748)—When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (written in 1707)—should reverberate through every heart as one contemplates the marvel of it all.

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

Written: 1707

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God; all the vain things that charm me most—I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down; did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Overview of the Book of Galatians

Thrust Statement: **Paul charges the churches of Galatia not to preach another way of justification before God other than faith in Jesus the Messiah.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 1:6-9.**

INTRODUCTION

This essay is designed to assist individuals in recapturing the very heart of the Gospel of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ, there is controversy over grace versus works. Many within this movement are trying to swing back to a more biblical stance concerning justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Just a casual look at the various journals from a number of camps within this once united movement reveals the turmoil that exists. In spite of Christ's prayer for unity, this fragmented movement is divided into at least twenty-five feuding splinter groups. There are many leaders within the various shattered divisions that are reexamining the traditional interpretation handed down during the last two hundred years. Many within the Stone/Campbell Movement are trying to call individuals back to a proper understanding of the Gospel of Christ.

This paper is not designed to castigate individuals within the Churches of Christ or Christian Churches, because many are seeking to correct the current mistreatment of **Galatians 1;6-9**, as well as many other abused Scriptures. The problems that presently exist within many Churches of Christ are a lack of understanding as to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. One of the most often cited Scriptures is **Galatians 1:6-9**. Many well-meaning leaders today give justification for their separation from other sincere believers by citing this Scripture. Yet, there are others within this movement who are trying to call attention to the context for a proper understanding of the Gospel. Just as Paul had to deal with specifics in his dealing with

the Judaizers, so, I, too, must deal with the misapplication of certain Scriptures that Christians have taken out of context to justify their chastisement and separation from other Christians.

Since I have spent most of my ministry (fifty-two years) in this movement, I am well qualified to write on this subject. I spent approximately seventeen years in the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. After my excommunication for refusing to reject Christians who thought it was okay to have individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper and Bible study classes, I identified myself with another segment of the Stone/Campbell Movement. I soon discovered that the movement started by Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell was/is divided into twenty-five or more distinctive religious societies. Many within the various fellowships accused the others of preaching another gospel.

This paper is written primarily to assist Christians in the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ to go back to the biblical text and to reexamine the context before building a theology on an isolated passage; generally, the current interpretation of this now famous quotation promotes division and hatred among God's people. One of the greatest errors that Christians encounter today is the common practice of citing Scriptures in isolation from their context. This is commonly known as proof-texting. This essay looks at **Galatians 1:6-9** in order to determine what the Gospel of Christ is all about. This composition is also written to give assistance to those who are seeking to bring about a correct understanding of the Gospel who still remain in one of the splintered groups, which he/she normally had nothing to do in the genesis, or origin, of its birth. In fact, most of us have inherited our heritage from our religious training. Even though I am dealing with individuals within the Stone/Campbell Movement, I am conscious that many leaders within this alliance are endeavoring to bring about a change, just as I am, in understanding concerning a proper comprehension of the Gospel of Christ and also to correct the current practice of dividing every time there is a difference of opinion.

Orthodoxy Versus God's Gospel

As one seeks to understand the Book of Galatians, one must come to grips with one's orthodoxy. Does one's orthodoxy set aside God's grace? Many Christians will readily admit that one must not allow one's orthodoxy to set aside God's grace, but, at the same time, one quickly discovers that this is the case among many Christians. The Judaizers had a different set of agendas from the modern church today. The religious leaders added circumcision and the keeping of the Law as prerequisites to salvation. On the other hand, numerous Christians, today, have added their own orthodoxy to faith in order for one to inherit eternal life. Christians, as a whole, can understand Paul's reaction to circumcision as a condition of salvation. For the religious leaders, it was faith plus works. Today, it is faith plus one's interpretation of the Scriptures. For some, it is faith plus a cappella singing—instrumental music is sinful; for others, it is faith plus one-cup in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper—individuals cups are condemned; for a few, it is faith plus pinching the bread in the observance of the Lord's Supper—one cannot break the bread; for another segment within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus no kitchens in the church building; for a small majority, it is faith plus the King James Version only—other

translations are anathema; still for others, it is faith plus grape juice in the Lord's Supper—wine cannot be used; for a smaller number, it is faith plus the head covering for women; and even for a smaller number, it is faith plus long hair on women—women cannot even cut the dead ends off their hair. For a few, it is faith plus a refusal to assist from the church treasury the support of an evangelist through another local church—support must be given directly to the minister, and so on.

All of the above oddities advanced by many Christians are associated with the Gospel. The Gospel, for many Christians, is identified as the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Then, this concept of the Gospel boils down to one's interpretation of the twenty-seven books. If one differs from a particular warring faction within the splintered Churches of Christ, then each isolated group accuses the other of preaching another Gospel. Just a perusal of some of the religious journals within the Churches of Christ reveals that the Churches of Christ as a whole are preaching another Gospel. For many Christians, the Gospel is defined as faith plus my interpretation of the Scriptures.

If Christians are to avoid nullifying God's grace, one must understand what the Gospel of God is all about. In order for one to preach the Gospel, one must first understand what the Gospel is. This essay is designed to explore Paul's own definition of the Gospel. What is the Gospel? The answer to this question is found in **Galatians 1:4**. In **1:11**, Paul labors the point as to what the Gospel is not. It is not something that man made up. Paul, in the first chapter of Galatians, states clearly that the Gospel he preached had to do with God's Son (**1:16**). Paul objects to man's substitution of tradition plus the Gospel for salvation (**2:3; 2:6**). As one seeks to understand Galatians, one needs to compare the tradition of circumcision to the traditions found within many Churches of Christ. Numerous Christians have substituted their oddities in pattern theology in place of circumcision. Churches today are adding to God's plan of salvation by faith in the same sense that the Judaizers did concerning circumcision. Just as Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship from the Gentiles prevented Peter from walking in harmony with the truth of the Gospel, so today, one's withdrawal from table fellowship from other Christians who do not subscribe to his/her brand of orthodoxy also fail to walk in harmony with the truth of the Gospel.

BACKGROUND OF GALATIANS

The churches to which Paul wrote this Epistle were founded during his first missionary journey (see **Acts 13** and **14**). This Epistle to the churches in the province of Galatia was probably written about 48 CE (Common Era), the earliest of Paul's letters. This letter reveals that certain Jewish Christians, who wanted to bind certain Old Testament rites as essential to salvation, especially circumcision, had infiltrated the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul's adversaries had perverted the Gospel of Christ by adding additional requirements for justification. As a result of the actions of certain men, Paul sets forth a vigorous apologetic for justification by faith in Jesus alone, that is to say, nothing less and nothing more.

Countless Christians today read this Epistle without any consciousness that they too violate the Gospel of Christ just as the Judaizers did in Paul's day. Just a few years ago, several preachers tried to get me thrown out of a Christian university for my stance that the Gospel of Christ is not twenty-seven books called the New Testament.

In fact, these men were, in essence, preaching another gospel, that is, another way of justification other than by faith. When I began my ministry back in January 1951, I, too, taught another way of salvation, namely, salvation by works. Essentially then, according to my insight, the Gospel of Christ had to do with crossing every "t" and dotting every "i" according to the party creed, otherwise one was preaching another gospel. In the first fifteen years of my ministry, I don't ever recall having heard a message on grace or justification by faith, which included my own preaching.

If one employed instrumental music in the praise service, then that fellowship was preaching another gospel. If one used individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, then this one was preaching another gospel. If anyone taught anything that my meticulous fellowship disagreed with, then the others were preaching another gospel. But after my excommunication from this fellowship, I identified with a congregation that employed individual communion cups and Sunday school. What I soon discovered was that they too utilized **Galatians 1:6-9** to clobber everyone who refused to kowtow to their particular brand of orthodoxy. They just had a different set of agendas. Today, the narrow fellowship that I labored with in the beginning of my ministry (1951) is divided into several offshoots. But this same mentality, as a whole, is also true within the other fellowships. Why so many splinter groups among these believers? None can agree on what the Gospel of Christ is.

There is little difference today within many congregations from the Judaizers in Paul's day. Christians today, as well as then, are divided over how a man is put in a right relationship with God—by works or by faith. A part of the confusion has come about as a result of the piece-meal hermeneutics that is so prevalent among numerous Christians. In other words, scores of Christians practice proof-texting instead of reading the book as a book for its flow of thoughts and teachings. The Gospel of Christ is as much an enigma today as it was to the Christian Judaizers. This confusion is as a result of numerous leaders within the Christian community who refuse to go back to the drawing board, so to speak, and to reexamine the traditions handed down by the forefathers within their distinctive society.

Some within the Churches of Christ have gone back to the text, but they have received tremendous opposition. There are scores of preachers and elders in my own hometown (Montgomery, AL) who have suffered attack for their stand on grace and fellowship with other believers. This castigation is generated within the various fellowships of the splinter groups that are also associated with the denominational Churches of Christ. This change of mind is true throughout numerous Churches of Christ, not just in Montgomery, AL. Hopefully, this brief overview of the Book of Galatians will assist every individual in his/her understanding more clearly what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Is Not Rituals

If one is going to define the word *gospel* in the Book of Galatians, one must look to the book itself in order to arrive at a clear and precise definition. In order for one to read things out of the Book of Galatians and not read one's own agenda into it,

one must always examine context. To illustrate how I, in my earlier ministry, read into the text instead of out of the text, I will examine **Galatians 1:6-9** in light of its immediate context. This one unit of Scripture is one that I memorized as a boy preacher. In my ignorance of this pericope (division or section of Scripture), I, in actuality, zeroed in on preaching another gospel. The same is still true today in almost every unique body of believers. Even today, many of these devout Christians invariably substitute one law for another law. For many Christians, Christianity is based upon a correct application of the so-called new law or regulative principle of worship, that is to say, five so-called acts of worship, which is also called pattern theology within some movements associated with the Stone/Campbell Movement, which law is more stringent than the Law of Moses; at least, this is the interpretation according to some expositors.

The so-called "law of Christ" in **Galatians 6:2** is generally identified, at least with some Christians, with one's own brand of orthodoxy, that is to say, one's interpretation of the Scriptures regarding the so-called five acts of worship, not the law of love. **Galatians 6:2**, like **Galatians 1:6-9**, is interpreted by many sincere Christians with smuggled prejudices from inherited traditions. As a result of this looseness of interpretation, the flames of prejudice have burned into the hearts of men and women for the last two hundred years beginning with the Stone/Campbell Movement. Out of the Stone/Campbell Movement originated three separate religious bodies: Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ. And from the Churches of Christ came another twenty-five or more idiosyncratic or unique fellowships.

Almost everyone within the various religious bodies that grew out of this particular movement that had its original focus on uniting Christians in all the assorted sects in Christendom have heard these verses (**1:6-9**) cited to give credence to the rejection of other believers on the pretense that they were preaching another gospel if they violated the traditional understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Again, the problem of how to be faithful to the Gospel arose over the correct interpretation of the five acts of worship, which, supposedly, God prescribed. Churches divided over numerous issues and each eccentric fellowship accused the other exclusive society of preaching another gospel. To some believers, the five acts is in essence the same as the gospel that Paul writes about in **Galatians 1:6-9**. Why am I concerned about what is going on within the various divisions within the Churches of Christ? I am dealing with the Gospel. When one perverts the Gospel of Christ, one is treading on dangerous ground. The nature of the gospel was of such importance in the scheme of redemption that Paul even warned the Galatians that even if an angel preached another gospel than the one he preached, they should let even the angel be accursed. Listen to Paul as he writes:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again:

If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (**Galatians 1:6-9**)![1]

If one wishes to grasp the Gospel that Paul preached, one should consult the entire Book of Galatians in order to get a feel for the authentic nature of the Gospel of Christ. If something does not make sense, one should immediately consult the context. The context actually defines **Galatians 1:6-9**. One should, without delay, check with the words of Paul in **1:4** if he or she wishes to understand what the Gospel is that Paul proclaimed. In this verse, he goes right to the very heart of the Gospel; he takes the time to explain what the Gospel is all about before he warns the Galatians about the danger of preaching another gospel. Paul starts this Epistle with a ready definition of the Gospel. One should concentrate vigilantly to his explanation as he seeks to capture the very essence of the Gospel:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Galatians 1:3-5**).

As one cautiously reads **verse four**, one must ask certain questions: (1) what is the Gospel? and (2) what is the Gospel of God about? In response to the first question, one can quickly say that the answer is Jesus. In reply to the second question, one can say that the Gospel deals with God's methodology of redemption, namely, Jesus. Yes, the Gospel is about the One who gave Himself for the sins of sinful humanity in order to rescue the fallen race from damnation. It is about what Jesus did in His atonement, not what man does. One can also say that this Gospel details that one's justification before God can only be through faith in His Son, not works.

CHAPTER ONE

The Gospel Is Jesus

Immediately following his explanation of the Gospel (**1:4**), he then warns the Galatians that if any man proclaims another way of salvation other than through faith in Jesus, one should let that individual be "eternally condemned" (**1:8**). After that, in the next pericope (**1:11-24**), he informs the Galatians that the Gospel he proclaimed did not come from man.

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. [12] I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (**1:11-12**).

Paul introduces his proclamation as something that did not originate with man, but rather with Jesus Christ. Identification of the Gospel that Paul preached (**1:11**) is essential to a correct understanding of the Gospel that he speaks of in **1:6-9**. What did he preach? He preached Jesus. Listen to him as he reveals the substance of his preaching:

But when God, who set me apart from birth [a] and called me by his grace, was pleased [16] to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man (**1:15-16**).

The Gospel that Paul speaks of in **1:6-9** has to do with the preaching of Jesus, not man-made rituals, rituals of the Law of Moses, or even the Law itself. The Gospel has to do with preaching Jesus as God's way of salvation. Even today, many Christians still do not understand the Gospel that Paul preached. It is not uncommon, as stated above, for certain Christians to identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. To add something to the Gospel as a condition of salvation is to destroy the very idea of grace. For one to add to the Gospel of God's grace is to nullify grace.

Many Christians, unknowingly, have nullified God's grace through their philosophy of "pattern theology," that is, five prescribed rituals to be performed on Sunday morning between the hours of 9am to 10am. It is not just five prescribed rituals that nullify the Gospel, but the insistence that these five rituals must be performed in a prescribed way in order for one to have salvation. Thus, the Gospel of Christ is turned into another law that is more stringent than even the Law of Moses. For example, the Gospel, at least to some Christians, is reflected in the following beliefs:

- Acappella singing versus instrumental accompaniment
- Church name (Church of Christ)
- One cup in the distribution of the Lord's Supper (The one-cup movement will not fellowship Christians who employ individual cups in the Lord's Supper.)
- No Sunday school (This movement advances the idea that one cannot teach the Bible in classes on Sunday morning—must be taught in one assembly on Sunday morning.)
- Bible colleges (supported by congregations)
- Grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper
- Break bread or pinch bread in the Lord's Supper
- Kitchen in the church building
- Orphan homes (supported by congregations)
- Church contributions (cannot be distributed to individuals that are not members of the church)

Unfortunately, as a young preacher boy, I was taught to memorize **Galatians 1:6-9** and then apply these verses to many of the above items. The one who taught me was sincere in his understanding. In my judgment, his misapplication was not rebellion against God, but rather an honest mistake of the heart. Nevertheless, if one

participated in Sunday school (Bible study) on Sunday morning, then this fellowship was preaching "another gospel." If one used an instrument in the congregational singing, then one was preaching "another gospel." If one broke the bread in the Lord's Supper rather than pinch the bread (the bread had to remain one piece—no fragments), then one was accused of preaching "another gospel." On and on this kind of analysis flowed/flows until the body of Christ was/is ripped apart into various warring factions, none could/can agree on what the Gospel was/is about. In the early 70s, I was accused of preaching another gospel when I refused to reject fellowship with Christians who employed individual communion cups and who participated in Sunday school. Thus, this strange fellowship threw me out of the synagogue for so-called unfaithfulness—that is, preaching another gospel.

As one reflects back upon **1:11**—"the gospel I preached"—can one honestly identify the above list of ten items as "the gospel" that Paul preached? Again, what was the "revelation" (**1:12**) he received? Once more, the context is the deciding factor in understanding **1:11-12**. Pay attention once more to Paul in **1:16** as he explains what it was that he preached: "to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Again, one can hardly read **1:16** without a consciousness of **1:4**: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age."

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL OPPOSES PETER FOR HYPOCRISY

The Truth of the Gospel

When one adds another condition to salvation other than faith in Jesus, one preaches another gospel. Prior to Paul's confrontation with Peter over how an individual is put in a right relationship with God, he states that three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem to see Peter (**1:18**). It was fourteen years later that he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem (**2:1**). This time he went in response to a revelation that he received in order to "set before them the gospel" that "he preached among the Gentiles" (**2:2**). The question of circumcision and the keeping of the Law had infiltrated the fellowship of believers. Paul, along with Barnabas and Titus, went privately to the leaders in order to try to prevent this trip from ending in confusion as to the true nature of the Gospel that Paul preached to the Gentiles and that Peter preached to the Jews (**2:2-4**). Paul states emphatically that the leaders did not compel Titus to be circumcised (**2:3**). Yet, there were certain brothers who wanted to insist upon circumcision as a condition of salvation (**2:4**; see also **Acts 15:1-2**).

Paul refused to back down on the issue of adding another condition to salvation other than faith in the Son of God: "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (**Galatians 2:5**). The leaders saw that the Gospel had been entrusted to Paul to preach to the Gentiles and that the Gospel had been entrusted to Peter to preach to the Jews (**2:7**). When one adds something to faith in Christ as a condition of salvation, then one must stand up for the "mystery" of God that had been hidden from ages past in order that "the truth of the gospel" might not be nullified. Later, Paul confronted Peter for his actions in withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles when certain men came from James (**2:11-12**). This withdrawal from the

Gentiles created such confusion that "even Barnabas was led astray" (**2:13**). How did Paul react under such circumstances when "the truth of the gospel" was at stake? Paul expresses his reaction this way:

> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs (**2:14**)?

A brief summary of what has been pointed out thus far is necessary in order for one not to forget the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning the true nature of the Gospel of Christ. In **1:4**, Paul gives the essence of the Gospel—"Who gave himself for our sins." Then in **2:11**, he reveals his desire to make known the gospel he preached. But in **2:16**, he reveals the Gospel as Jesus. In **2:2**, he sets before the leaders the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. After his encounter with certain men who came from James who wanted to add circumcision as a condition of salvation, he objected in order that "the truth of the gospel might remain" (**2:4-5**). Then later Paul had to rebuke Peter, along with others, for their adulterating the "truth of the gospel" with their withdrawal from the Gentiles (**2:12-13**). Once more, he captures their departure as not in harmony with the "truth of the gospel" (**2:14**). Paul did not rebuke Peter for preaching another gospel, but rather he rebuked him for his actions that were not in harmony with the very nature of the Good News concerning God's way of salvation—faith in Jesus.

The Truth of the Gospel Equals Justification by Faith

Just as Paul sets forth the nature of the Gospel in **1:4**, he now goes right to the very heart of the Gospel in **2:15-16**:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Just as the word *mystery* filled the Book of Ephesians, so the word *faith* flashes like neon lights across the Book of Galatians. The word *faith* is the key to grasping what the Gospel of God is all about. It is about God's way of redeeming sinful humanity—through faith in His Son Jesus. God only has one way of salvation—faith in Jesus. The words "faith in Jesus Christ" and "justified by faith in Christ" set the tone for the rest of the Book as Paul seeks to explain the nature of the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, God's way of justification. One can never be justified through observing law, or law keeping.

Paul drives home this point throughout this short Epistle. No one, writes Paul, can be justified through observing the Law (**2:16**). Again, the question that confronts everyone is: How does one live? Paul explains his own life by saying, "I live by faith in the Son of God" (**2:20**). Justification is "by faith." But faith has for its object, Jesus. It is "by faith in Jesus Christ" and "justified by faith in Christ." **Galatians 2:20** should

call forth Paul's words in **Ephesians 4:5**: "one Lord, one faith." The Gospel justifies those whom the Law condemns. Faith attributes salvation entirely to Christ, which eliminates works—works of any kind.

If righteousness could be obtained through law keeping, then Christ, according to Paul, "died for nothing" (**Galatians 2:21b**). When one seeks justification through rituals and regulations, regardless as to how good and beneficial, one sets aside the grace of God (**2:21a**). Having said this, Paul discusses the Spirit that God gave to the ones who responded to Jesus through faith. Leon Morris makes the point, and correctly so, that "no ritual act availed before God was central to the gospel he (Paul) preached and by which he lived. He preached Christ crucified, not circumcision."[2]

Once more, Morris cuts away all the underbrush that men have added to salvation: "The Message about the cross means that people can do nothing to bring about their salvation, nothing at all. It insists that Christ has done all that is necessary by laying down his life in place of sinners."[3] It is not uncommon for numerous Christians within the Churches of Christ to pass off the religious customs (traditions) from the church fathers as the Gospel of God. In other words, many Christians still confuse ritual prescriptions and religious requirements of oral tradition as the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, the Gospel that Paul preached. Christians must abandon their so-called five acts of worship as a prerequisite to salvation. It is not uncommon for many—not all--within the Churches of Christ to advance a notion of salvation through perfect obedience to the so-called new law concerning a worship service. Around this worship service, the five acts must be performed in a prescribed manner; otherwise, one is on his/her way to hell. For many, the right performance plus faith merits salvation, not faith alone.

When Peter and the others were not walking in line with the "truth of the Gospel" (**2:14**), Paul stepped in to stop the movement away from the very heart of the Gospel he preached. What is the "truth of the gospel"? It is justification by faith in Christ (**2:16**), pure and simple. Unless one grasps this concept, there can never be unity among God's divided people, not just Church of Christ folk. As Ronald Y. K. Fung expresses it: "The truth of the gospel was none other than justification by faith in Christ alone and not by works of the law—a principle which applied to Jew and Gentile alike and hence was the basis of the Church's unity."[4]

CHAPTER THREE

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Paul questions the Galatians about how they received the Holy Spirit. He asked: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" (**3:2**). How did they receive the Holy Spirit? It is obvious that they received the Holy Spirit after they believed the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Salvation can never be through human efforts. Paul cuts away all underbrush concerning salvation when he writes: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (**3:3**).

Paul employs repetition as a means of calling attention to the very heart of the Gospel. In **verse three**, he informed the Galatians that they received the Spirit by believing what they heard (**3:2-3**). Now, once more, he calls attention to the Holy Spirit as a gift: "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (**3:5**). Again, it is law versus faith. In order to reinforce his arguments, he introduces Abraham and his faith. Over again, one observes the word *believed* as Paul develops the means of receiving the righteousness that belongs to God. He writes:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**3:6-9**).

One can hardly read this pericope (unit or section) without cognition of the word *faith* as employed by Paul. The following expressions utilized by Paul stands out, as it were, in bold neon lights: "He believed," "those who believe," "justify the Gentiles by faith," "those who have faith," and "Abraham, the man of faith." Since "The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith," Paul writes that God "announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." The context lays emphasis, not on Abraham's faithfulness, but on Abraham's faith. The Gospel announced in advance to Abraham is the Gospel that Paul announces in **1:4** and, at the same time, cautions one about preaching another way of salvation other than that which Jesus offers to anyone who believes in Him (see also **John 3:14-18**, **36**; **5:24**; **6:29**, **40**, **47**).

Paul places a curse upon anyone who preaches another way of justification before God other than "faith" in Jesus the Son of God" (**1:6-9**). Paul stresses that salvation can never be through "human effort," but only through faith in Jesus the Savior of the world (**3:3**, **11**, **14**). One must question the substance of what was announced to Abraham in advance in order to clearly see the positive aspects of the Gospel of Christ. What was announced to Abraham in advance? Yes, the Gospel was announced in advance. What is the Gospel? As stated above, many identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. In other words, the various denominational Churches of Christ determine their own "human effort" as the means of obtaining salvation, not faith in Jesus. It is always "faith" plus their "interpretation" of isolated Scriptures from their contexts. Why is the Gospel so difficult for some Christians to understand? The answer lies in the hermeneutics (science of interpretation). For example, the hermeneutical method utilized by the various theological factions today determine what **Galatians 1:6-9** should say beforehand in order to support their theological system of aloofness.

Almost any interpretation can be placed upon a verse(s) if the context is ignored. One must first determine the context before application. If one expects to interpret the word *gospel* in Galatians, one must first learn to pay attention to the context—the Book of Galatians. It is not uncommon for the Book of Galatians to be read through the lens of one's own particular warring splinter group. When one encounters an interpretation that does not make sense, then one must go digging for

answers to solve the hermeneutical dilemma. In response to the question above: What was announced in advance to Abraham? If one says that the Gospel is twenty-seven books called the New Testament, then one is confronted with a correct interpretation of this so-called new law book in order for one not to preach "another gospel," for each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement asserts that it, and it alone, is preaching the true gospel. Ultimately, the Gospel of Christ boils down to one's odd interpretation of certain isolated texts from its context.

When one assigns an interpretation of the gospel announced to Abraham with the so-called prescribed five acts of worship, one immediately sees the folly of such an interpretation. Did God announce in advance that the singing in the Christians' community must be a cappella rather than instrumental? Did God announce in advance that the Lord's Supper must be observed with one cup upon the table rather than each person having his/her own cup in the drinking of the Cup of Blessing? Did God announce in advance that in the Lord's Supper one must "pinch" the bread rather than "break" the bread? Did God announce to Abraham that in the time of Christ (2000 years in the future), Christians could not have a kitchen in the church building? Did God announce in advance to Abraham that in the Lord's Supper one must use grape juice rather than wine? This list is almost *ad infinitum*. The various oddities depend on which of the several of militaristic groups that one talks to. Each distinctive society of believers has its own agenda as to what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

Again, one must ask the question: What was announced in advance to Abraham almost two thousand years before the Word became flesh (**John 1:14**)? The answer is that God announced to Abraham His means of justifying sinful humanity, that is to say, faith in Jesus. Jesus is the object of one's faith. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ. Paul states the record very clearly on this point:

> Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."[d] [12] The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."[e] [13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."[f] [14] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**Galatians 3:11-14**).

Once more, one discovers that the word *faith* flashes like neon lights in these words of Paul as he seeks to set forth the very heart of the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham two thousand years earlier. The blessing given to Abraham is available to everyone through Christ Jesus. Thus, it is through faith that one receives the promise of the Spirit (**3:2-3, 14**), not human effort (**3:3**). In order for Paul to nail down his arguments, he says,

> Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. [16] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The

> Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," [a] meaning one person, who is Christ (**3:15-16**).

He did not say as to SEEDS as of many, but rather to SEED, meaning one person, who is Christ. This is the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News of God's way of salvation by faith. This same thought is presented in Paul's words to the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). When one says by "faith alone," one is not falsifying Paul's words to the Ephesians. This phrase only clarifies and emphasizes what Paul clearly says. On the other hand, the Judaizers wanted to make human efforts, in addition to faith in Jesus, the means of salvation, but Paul says NO! Paul, as he concludes his arguments about the Law, writes: "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe" (**Galatians 3:22**).

Paul drives home the point that one's right standing with God is not based upon human efforts, but rather one's standing before God is based upon "faith." Take note once more to Paul as he seeks to nail the coffin shut concerning the place of law in the life of the believer: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. [24] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (**3:23-25**). The following chart sets forth the thrust of the entire Book of Galatians:

Galatians 2:15-16	Galatians 3:23-25
We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.	Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. [24] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ [b] that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Justification by faith in Christ is the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham. Before "the faith" came, the Law held individuals prisoners. The Law was designed to lead one to Christ in order that one might be justified by faith. Paul expresses this same thought in his letter to the Romans:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**Romans 3:19-20**).

When one looks at the Law of God, one cannot open his/her mouth in his/her defense. The Law of God shuts every person's mouth. It is not until one is consciously black-and-blue from the demands of the Law and, at the same time, smitten by the Law of God to the very core of his/her soul that one will turn to the Gospel for the healing of his/her wounds. Until one is seized by and jailed by the Law of God, one will not change direction to Christ for freedom from guilt. Until one is condemned and killed by the Law, one will not call upon Christ for justification.[5]

The Gospel of Christ is the Good News of justification by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. God accomplished redemption for sinful humanity through the cross of Christ. The Book of Galatians is full of the cross of Christ. Without the cross of Christ, one can say that justification of the *unjust* would be *unjustified*. It is through the cross that God rescues humanity from condemnation. God's answer to sin is the cross. What did Christ do upon the Cross? Listen to Paul as he details this information to the Galatians:

Galatians 1:3-5	**Galatians 2:20-21**	**Galatians 3:13-14**
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.	I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!	Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."[f] 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The only reason that God can justify sinful humanity is that Christ died for the ungodly upon the cruel cross of Calvary. The **Book of Galatians** sets forth, in clear terms, God's means of justification, which is by faith in Jesus. As **chapter three** concludes, Paul again calls attention to how individuals become children of God: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:26**). In **verse twenty-four** of this same chapter, he writes: "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." Then in **verse twenty-two**, Paul pens: "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe." Again, as one, once more peruses **chapter three**, one observes that the word *faith* fills this chapter. Listen to Paul as he expresses how one receives the promise of the Sprit: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (**3:14**).

In **3:26-29**, Paul sets forth "faith" in Christ as that which levels all humanity. The Judaizers could not accept this principle of faith. Even today, many Christians cannot accept the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Nevertheless, Paul drove home the point that Christ secured salvation for all who would put their faith in Him. In other words, Christ has accomplished it all in His curse-bearing death upon the cross (**3:13**). Salvation is through faith in Him. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Christ through His sin-bearing death and His curse-bearing death, which is embraced by faith. Every believer must bear in mind that the source of one's salvation is God; the ground of one's justification is Jesus, and the means of one's justification is by faith. Paul in his Roman epistle sets forth this same understanding. In **chapter 3**, Paul writes:

> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

One should remember that justification is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and through faith alone; it can be no other way. This is what Paul stresses from beginning to end in the Book of Galatians. Biblical faith has Jesus for its object. John R.W. Stott expresses this truth with care and eloquence when he writes: "The value of faith is not to be found in itself, but entirely and exclusively in its object, namely Jesus Christ and him crucified."[6] In the **first three chapters**, Paul covers a period of two thousand years of history. He began with God's promise to Abraham (born: 2166 BCE) concerning his SEED, which is Christ (**3:6-25**). In **Romans Four**, Paul develops this subject in greater detail. In **chapter three of Galatians**, he writes concerning Abraham's faith: "He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (**3:6**).

CHAPTER FOUR

Bondage versus Freedom

4:1-11

In **chapter four**, Paul continues to develop the subject of salvation through faith. In order for one to receive the "full rights of sons" (**4:5**), Jesus came to redeem individuals from the Law (**4:4**). One can only receive the "full rights of sons" through the finished work of Christ upon the cross. One can only appropriate this freedom through faith in Jesus. When one is redeemed from Law, God sends forth the Sprit of His Son into his/her heart. Paul stresses that this giving of the Sprit did not come through Law keeping, but rather through faith (**3:2-5; 4:4-6**). As stated above, in **chapter three**, Paul covers two thousand years of Old Testament history beginning with God's call of Abraham out of Ur of Chaldea. In the **third chapter**, he analyzed three great figures—Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

He calls forth Abraham to show that God promised to bless all nations through his seed. Then he calls attention to the giving of the Law to Moses, which, in and of itself, did not annul the promise God made to Abraham, but, on the other hand, made the coming of Christ more imperative. For Paul, the Law acted as a means of driving

men and women to Him for release from their burdens of sin and guilt. Now, in the **fourth chapter** of **Galatians**, Paul covers once more the past that he dealt with in **chapter three**. In **verses 1-3**, he discusses the condition of men and women under the Law—slavery. Next, in **verses 4-8**, he talks about the situation of men and women in Christ—sons of God. Then, in **verses 9-11**, he bemoans the fact that many were turning back to slavery—enslaved all over again. Stott summarizes these eleven verses by saying, "Once we were slaves. Now we are sons. How, then, can we turn back to the old slavery?"[7]

Many Christians today are exchanging the Gospel of God's grace for good works. Within many churches, the good works are related to the so-called five-step plan of salvation and the so-called five-acts of worship performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner, which usually rules out mechanical instruments in praise to God. The Book of Galatians is as timely today as it was almost two thousand years ago. The orthodoxy of many churches completely obscures the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When one adds his/her own brand of orthodoxy as a condition of salvation, this one adds to the conditions of salvation as much as the Judaizers did that Paul confronted in his Galatian letter. In the biographical information about Paul (**Philippians 3:1-11**), one quickly discovers that Paul was converted from one understanding of righteousness to another—from his own righteousness of works to God's righteousness by faith (see also **Romans 9:30—10:21**)

Paul, in the Book of Galatians, labors the point that there is a difference between a religion of works and a religion of grace. For Paul, there is only one Gospel—justification by faith through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Many, especially those within the various factions of the Churches of Christ, have added their own requirements to the Gospel message. Many believers see religion as keeping certain rules and regulations, not justification by faith in Jesus Christ. When anyone adds something to the Gospel of Christ as a condition of salvation, this one destroys the Gospel of grace. The central truth of the Gospel, as pointed out earlier, concerns the one who gave Himself for our sins (see **Galatians 1:4**).

The essential message of the Gospel is Christ crucified for the sins of humanity. Salvation is available through God's grace alone, and anyone who obscures salvation by faith alone must be opposed. What God has accomplished through the atonement of Christ is the Gospel message of salvation. When one adds his/her beliefs concerning the use of one-cup in the Lord's Supper, a cappella music only, no kitchens in the church building, no Sunday schools, and so on, this one actually nullifies the Gospel of God's grace. When one adds to the Gospel of God's grace, this person is preaching another gospel. The essence of the Gospel is the risen Jesus.

Paul's Concern for the Galatians

4:12-20

Paul expresses his deep concern for the Galatians lack of concern for the freedom they experienced in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Many were "turning back to those weak and miserable principles" that had previously enslaved them (**4:9**). Some of the believers desired to reinstate the ceremonial aspects of the Law as well as the keeping of the Law itself as a condition of salvation (**4:10**; see also **Acts 15:1-5**).

Paul objected to the Judaizers' emphasis upon circumcision and the keeping of the Law as a condition of salvation. Consequently, Paul became an enemy of some within the congregations scattered throughout the province of Galatia because he told them the truth about God's way of salvation—by grace alone and through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. In fact, he writes: "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (**Galatians 4:16**).

Many Christians today are receiving the brunt of ostracism by many other sincere zealous individuals who have never allowed Christ to be formed in them (see also **4:19**). This author, Dallas Burdette, talked at length with one of his second cousins recently (7-30-02) about his having received chastisement from his own typical fellowship for daring to preach on God's grace as the way of salvation. His own fleshly brother who is a deacon in this same fellowship of Christians also came under the wrath of the powers that be. Also, in this same congregation in Texas, another brother (no fleshly relationship) was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. He, too, was told to preach on the issues, that is to say, one-cup, no Sunday school, no instrumental music, and so on. Again, one witnesses many individuals within the one-cup movement that are seeking to recapture the very heart of the Gospel. This effort is quite wide in almost every segment within the Churches of Christ. Many preachers and elders are having great success in this area. Presently, I study with several preachers within the Churches of Christ, and everyone that I study with is preaching grace. Even though I am dealing with the Churches of Christ as a whole, one must never forget that within this movement there is a movement to draw people back to a true understanding of the Gospel.

These three episodes are not isolated events within this very narrow, sectarian group. What were these three men accused of? They were accused of being "grace preachers." In fact, one of these men was called a "false teacher" for preaching on grace. Hopefully, one can understand why the Book of Galatians is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote this forceful letter against the legalist. When congregations do not like the message of grace, the preachers of grace become the enemies of these individuals, or other congregations who do not preach grace as God's way of salvation. Those individuals and congregations who preach grace are blackballed from the so-called loyal churches—party loyalty must be maintained at all cost. This mindset is not just true within this distinctive fellowship, but it is true among other churches out of the Stone/Campbell Movement. In other words, the private theological whims of some preachers become the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, their own subjective doctrinal fancies.

Hagar and Sarah

4:21-31

Paul continues his arguments against the Judaizers in order to try to convince those reverting back to Judaism to think about what they are doing. Paul discusses Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem in order to drive home his message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (see also **2:16; 3:11**). This pericope is addressed to those "who want to be under the law" (**4:21**). The Judaizers wanted to turn the Gospel of God's grace into law. They, like so many Christians today, advanced the notion that strict adherence to regulations, to traditions, and to

ceremonies is what puts one in a right relationship with God. In other words, salvation is not based on faith alone in Jesus, but rather upon one's correctly adhering to the proper performance of certain works as defined by the religious leaders. For Paul, anyone who lives under law is under condemnation—and I might add that this is true of any law, not just the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses pointed individuals to the One who would bring salvation.

The Historical: Abraham

4:22-23

In this section of Scripture (**4:21-31**), Paul calls forth the historical (**4:22-23**), the allegorical/typological (**4:24-27**), and the personal (**4:28-31**) to illustrate beyond doubt the true nature of the Gospel he originally set forth on his first missionary tour (see also **4:13; Acts 13:1—14:28**). Paul, like John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:7-12**), calls attention to the fact that true descent from Abraham is not physical but spiritual (**Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4:16**). The following chart sets forth in parallel columns the misunderstanding of the religious leaders perception of salvation as well as the correct interpretation of the data in the **Book of Genesis** and **Galatians** concerning Abraham as the father of the faithful:

Matthew 3:9	**Galatians 3:29**
And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.	If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Both John the Baptist and Paul zero in on the true seed of Abraham. The historical element of **chapter 4** (**vv. 22-23**) is also illustrated in **chapter 3**. One should read these two verses with the comprehension that Paul is endeavoring to bolster his claim that justification is by faith alone. Earlier, in **chapter 3**, Paul elaborates on what John the Baptist implied in his message about the true nature of Abraham's seed and what Jesus specifically asserted in His confrontation with the Jews (**John 8:31-34**). Paul puts forth the point that the blessing God promised to Abraham comes not upon the Jews through natural descent, but upon all who believe—whether Jews or Gentiles. Paul writes: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (**3:14**). In Paul's letter to Rome, he writes about one who is and who is not a true Jew:

> A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. [29] No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God (**Romans 3:28-29**).

Paul illustrates his argument about the true seed of Abraham by calling attention to two of Abraham's sons. He writes:

> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. [23] His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise (**4:22-23**).

Paul draws two important distinctions between these two brothers—Ishmael and Isaac. Even though both boys had the same father, they did not have the same mother. The boys took after their mothers. Since Hagar was a slave, Ishmael was born into slavery. On the other hand, Sara was free; therefore, Isaac was born into freedom. Stott correctly says that "Isaac was not born according to nature, but rather against nature. . . . Ishmael was born according to nature, but Isaac against nature, supernaturally, through an exceptional promise of God."[8]

Thus, Paul emphasizes that everyone is either slave or free. If one is in Christ, he/she is no longer a slave but free. God's grace sets one free without the deeds of the Law. If one is a Christian, one has been born not of natural means, but rather one is born again through supernatural means. One can hardly reflect upon Paul's argument concerning justification without recalling what he said earlier in this same epistle: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (**3:8-9**).

The Allegory (Figurative/Typological): Hagar and Sarah

4: 24-27

Just as Ishmael and Isaac represent spiritual truth concerning slavery and freedom, so also Hagar and Sarah stand for two covenants. Hagar represents the Old Covenant, whereas Sarah represents the New Covenant. Yet, in the allegory/typology, one discovers that Paul paints another picture. These two women not only represent two covenants, but they also represent two Jerusalems, the earthly and the heavenly. Again, one should turn to Paul's arguments and listen attentively to him as he develops his arguments to uphold his thesis that one is justified by faith, not by the deeds of the Law. Again, his arguments go back to Abraham, the one justified through faith:

> These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. [25] Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. [27] For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." (**4:24-27**).

Hagar, according to Paul's arguments, represents "Mount Sinai," and Sara represents the new "Jerusalem that is above." This New Jerusalem is our mother, not Mount Sinai, which represents slavery. This section by Paul is written in order to give historical testimony to his principle of justification by faith. Thus, he goes back two thousand years to God's covenant with Abraham to give greater force to his arguments concerning justification by faith. Paul is not advancing a new theology, but rather he is setting forth Abraham as one who was justified by faith alone, without circumcision or works of the Law. Stott captures the very essence of Paul's position when he writes:

> This, then, is the allegory. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, born of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, who represent two covenants and two Jerusalems. Hagar the slave stands for the old covenant, and her son Ishmael symbolizes the church of the earthly Jerusalem. Sarah the free woman stands for the new covenant and her son Isaac symbolizes the church of the heavenly Jerusalem. Although superficially similar, because both were sons of Abraham, the two boys were fundamentally different. In the same way, Paul is arguing, it is not enough to claim Abraham as our father. The crucial question concerns who our mother is. If it is Hagar, we are like Ishmael, but if it is Sarah, we are like Isaac.[9]

Just as many Jews failed to understand that legal bondage and spiritual freedom cannot co-exist, one must go. Thus, when Paul and others addressed the issue of freedom in Christ or freedom from the Law of Moses, this teaching created turmoil and resulted in the Jews waging a war against Christians. A religion of regulations, as existed among the Jews, could not continue to exist if the set of laws were not strictly enforced. Today, legalistic bondage, within many local congregations of the Churches of Christ, also persecutes those who dare to disagree with the status quo. The status quo must be maintained at all cost. This mental concept of bondage is the very reason that so many churches are hopelessly divided into warring factions. What is the answer to our divisions? Until Christians understand that faith in Jesus is the unifying factor, there will never be unity within this Movement that started out as a movement to unite Christians in all the sects. If Christians want unity, then grace and love must permeate the lives of every believer. Morris has captured the very heart of grace: "When grace is central, the person has made love his dominant principle . . . it will be the power of that love and not the constraint of law that keeps us right, and love is always more powerful than law."[10]

Personal Application: Isaac Versus Ishmael

4:28-31

Paul turns, as it were, from Sarah and Hagar to the two boys—Isaac and Ishmael. Even though both boys were born of natural birth, nevertheless, one of the boys (Isaac) was born by the "power of the Spirit," not in the "ordinary way" (**4:29**). Sarah was ninety years old when she became pregnant (**Genesis 17:17**). If one wishes to share in the inheritance, one can only share in this blessing through the "free woman" (**4:30**). Paul's argument is that if one is a Christian, this one is like Isaac, not Ishmael. In other words, Christians are sons through supernatural means, not natural

means. To express this truth differently, the words of John are appropriate to express this same truth:

> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:10-13**).

It is in this same vein that Paul in the **fourth chapter of Romans** also sets forth the means of Abraham's justification before God. Paul says, "What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (**4:3**). Again, Paul writes: "The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all" (**4:16**). Is it any wonder that Paul addresses the subject of faith in Galatians prior to his illustrations concerning Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael? Listen to Paul as he seeks to nail down the means of one's justification:

> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27] for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (**Galatians 3:26-29**).

Even before the foundation of the earth, it had always been God's plan to justify His creatures through faith in His Son Jesus Christ (see **Ephesians 1:3-14; Genesis 3:15**), not works.

CHAPTER 5

Stand Firm in the Freedom of Christ

5:1-12

Paul wants the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom that Christ obtains for everyone who puts his/her trust in Him. It is not so much freedom from sin that Paul discusses, but rather it is freedom from the dominion of the Law that keeps one under bondage and condemnation. The freedom that Paul advances is gained only "in" and "through" Christ. Earlier, Paul writes:

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." [14] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**3:13-14**).

Stott, once more, focuses in on the very essence of Christianity when he cuts away all the underbrush by writing: "Christianity is freedom, not bondage. Christ has set us free; so we must stand firm in our freedom."[11] The slogan of the Judaizers was: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." (**Acts 15:2**). The false teachers advanced the notion that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. The religious leaders (party of the Pharisees) from Jerusalem added to God's scheme of justification: "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses" (**15:5**). In other words, the Pharisees were saying that Moses must finish what Christ set out to accomplish through His atonement. His death upon the cross was not sufficient for salvation. It could not possibly be by faith, so they thought.

Many Christians today read the Book of Galatians, but they cannot make the book relevant to today's society. Instead of circumcision and observance of the Law of Moses, a number of factions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have developed their own category of laws that must be adhered to in order to obtain salvation. In other words, salvation is by faith plus their interpretation of the five acts of worship. Some say you cannot be saved unless you drink out of one cup in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Yet, others advance the notion that one cannot be saved if he or she participates in the modern day Sunday school. Others make their oddities concerning kitchens in the church building and the dispensing of the monies collected on Sunday morning a condition of salvation. Some even go so far as to say that one cannot be saved if one uses an instrument in the singing in the assembly.

Just a short time ago (7-31-02), this author (Dallas Burdette) talked with a brother from a non-institutional fellowship of believers (Church of Christ). He related to me that the preacher before him was fired for being a "grace preacher." Another brother from the one cup and non-Sunday school fellowship informed me that he was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. In this same fellowship, a brother recently related to me that he was called a false teacher for preaching on grace. Another very devout Christian was also defrocked for not preaching on the issues; he was accused of not being balanced by preaching on grace. In almost all of these groups, salvation is presented as faith in Christ plus acceptance of their oddities in interpretation. For many Christians, faith in Christ is not sufficient to merit salvation—one must be correct on all doctrinal issues advanced by their own unique fellowship. But Paul reacts to this type philosophy concerning salvation. What does he say? Listen to him as he zeros in on this sort of mindset:

> It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (**5:1-5**).

Christ has set every individual free who looks to Him for redemption. Anyone who thinks that the finished work of Christ upon the cross is not sufficient for salvation and seeks justification through law, this person, says Paul, has fallen from Grace. One does not work for salvation. **Galatians 5:1-5** is quite clear as to how one receives righteousness. In this section of Scripture, Paul states two things about faith. First, he states that by faith one eagerly awaits the righteousness that is through the Spirit, and second, that what really matters is faith in Christ—a faith that expresses itself through love. In **verse six**, Paul is not saying that "works" of love are added as a condition of salvation, but rather, the faith that saves is a faith that issues in love. Paul stresses in this section (**5:1-5**), as well as the Book as a whole, that salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

In my fifty-two years of ministry, I have discovered that the greatest enemies of the faith are not unbelievers, but believers. I witness almost daily the persecution of Christians who are free by the people who desire to remain under bondage. Many within these distinctive churches are brutal in their attack against anyone who advances that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. Just as the religious people opposed Paul, so today, many religious leaders still persecute anyone who dares to teach what the Book of Galatians espouses—justification by faith. It is in Christ alone that one can inherit the promises. Many Christians still fail to understand that the salvation that Paul preached was a salvation by grace through faith. One must put his/her trust in God through Jesus Christ. For it is only in Him that one can one inherit God's promises and receive God's grace and obtain freedom from God's wrath. In the words of Morris, "justification can come about only because of what Christ has done. Therefore to seek it by *law* is to reject God's way of justification."[12]

Freedom from Christ: Not a License for Sinful Behavior

5:13-25

It is not works of law that counts with God, but rather a "faith that expresses itself through love" (**5:6**). Christians are not to use their freedom in Christ as justification for fulfilling the desires of the flesh (**5:13**). One's freedom in Christ should never be used as a pretext for self-indulgence. In the words of Stott: "Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin."[13] Paul, after listing numerous works of the flesh, reminds the believers in the various congregations in the province of Galatia: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (**5:24**). In this section, Paul, instead of dealing with theology (justification by faith), focuses in on ethical behavior that results from obedience to the Gospel, that is to say, trust in Jesus as God's way of salvation. William Barclay's comments on Christian freedom and ethical behavior are to the point. He writes with conciseness in this regard:

> His theology always ran one danger. When he declared that the end of the reign of law had come and that the reign of grace had arrived, it was always possible for someone to say, "That, then, means that I can do what I like; all the restraints are lifted and I can follow my inclinations wherever they lead me. Law is gone and grace ensures forgiveness anyway." But to the end of the day there remained for Paul two obligations. (i) One he does not mention

here but it is implicit in all his thinking. It is *the obligation to God*. If God loved us like that then the love of Christ constrains us. I cannot soil a life which God paid for with his own life. (ii) There is the *obligation to our fellow men*. We are free, but our freedom loves its neighbour as itself.[14]

Unfortunately, today many Christians still put forward the same questions to individuals that the religious leaders presented to Paul concerning grace and sin. Christians, nowadays, as well as in Paul's day, still feel that salvation by grace alone will lead to a life that is totally void of good works. In other words, the doctrine of grace will open the floodgates to ungodly behavior. But is this so? Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, also calls attention to the same mental philosophy of fear concerning his teaching on grace that is so prevalent among Christians who want to deny salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Listen to him as he sets up a scenario that some seem to have fostered:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, [a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (**Romans 6:1-7**).

Paul stresses the fact that Christians are no longer "slaves to sin." Believers have changed masters—from Satan to Christ. When one is in Christ, his/her freedom is a different type freedom; it is a freedom to serve Christ, not sin. Christians do not seek to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (**5:16**), but rather, every saint of God who seeks to be "led by the Spirit" (**5:18**) will deny himself or herself "the acts of the sinful nature" (**5:19**) It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Romans:

> 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:15-18**).

The Christians at Rome obeyed wholeheartedly the teachings of Jesus. An example of the teachings of Jesus can be found in His Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5—7**), as well as the Book of Romans. Many Christians refer to the "form of

teaching" (**Romans 6:17**) to baptism, but the context seems to indicate that Paul is discussing ethical behavior, not baptism. Even when one abstains from the works of the flesh, he or she still does not merit salvation. Paul discusses this concept of grace versus merit also to the Ephesians:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

Christians do "good works," not to earn salvation, but they do "good works" out of gratitude for God's gracious love. In Paul's epistle to Titus, he calls attention to pre-conversion behavior among those who had previously responded to God's grace. Prior to their conversion to Christ, he addresses their unscrupulous conduct as: "enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures" (**Titus 3:3**). But this kind of unethical behavior is no longer true with their conversion state. Once more, one should read carefully the words of Paul as he captures the essence of the new behavior resulting from conversion:

> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. [4] But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. [8] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**3:3-8**).

Christians are called upon to "serve one another in love" (**5:13**). Brothers and sisters in Christ are to be long-suffering with one another, even when individuals get on one's nerves and needle one to the point of fury. It is in this regard that many Christians would do well to heed the words of Paul: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (**5:15**). Today, many Christians are "biting and devouring" one another as so-called defenders of the faith once for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**). This faith, according to many Christians, is not faith in Jesus, but the orthodoxy of a distinctive group. Since there are over twenty-five distinctive fellowships within the religious body that I grew up in, one should cautiously approach the traditional interpretations handed down from one generation to the next by each distinctive fellowship. In this same chapter (**5**), Paul draws attention to the kind of behavior that God demands of His people:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature

with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:22-26**).

Freedom in Christ does not mean that one can refuse to comply with the Law of God (**Romans 3:31**). All Christians should, even as Paul, delight in the Law of God (**7:22**), because the Law of God is "holy, righteous, and good" (**7:12**). Freedom in Christ concerns one's relationship with God. In the words of Stott: "It means that our acceptance depends not on our obedience to the law's demands, but on faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse of the law when He died."[15] Thus, for Paul, when individuals love one another, they can say, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (**5:14**). Morris makes the point that "Christians enjoy freedom indeed, but it is the freedom to serve other people in love."[16] One cannot read this section of Scripture about love without reflection upon the words of Jesus in **Matthew 22:37-40**. Once more, Morris draws attention to the usefulness of the Law in defining behavior that pleases God: "The rejection of law-keeping as the way of salvation does not alter the fact that the law gives us a useful guide to the way we should live."[17]

James Versus Paul

Even though Christians are justified by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, one must involve himself or herself in good works, which God ordained that His people perform. One can hardly reflect upon the words of Paul about justification by faith without some reflection upon the words of James: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (**2:24**). The following chart sets forth the two sections of Scripture that appear on the surface to be in opposition:

Galatians 3:6-12	**James 2:14-25**
Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."[a] [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. [10] All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."[c] [11] Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by	What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [15] Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. [16] If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? [17] In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. [18] But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. [19] You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. [20] You foolish man, do you

faith."[d] 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."	want evidence that faith without deeds is useless[a]? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"[b] and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

These two Scriptures (**Galatians 3:6-12** and **James 2:14-25**), on surface reading, seemingly contradict each other. Needless to say, the contradiction is only apparent, not real. As one encounters the various distinctive fellowships within the Churches of Christ, one quickly observes that expositors of the Word of God often read the New Testament in light of their own cultural experience of salvation by works, not salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Many interpret **James 2:14-25** in terms of their own odd fellowship or prevailing cultural religious background. It is not uncommon for believers to read the Holy Scriptures through a pair of spectacles created through the framework of their own thought patterns rather than reading the Scriptures inductively.

James 2:14-25 is cited by many well-meaning Christians in order to nullify **Galatians 3:6-12**. This remark is not intended to question the integrity of those who undermine the words of Paul in **Galatians 2:16**. Nevertheless, every believer in Christ must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to the church from the forefathers. Many still confuse a traditional reading of a text with the text itself. The traditional interpretation assigned to **James 2:14-25**, especially within many Churches of Christ, make it difficult, if not almost impossible, to read the text accurately. The powerful in influence, frequently, have a difficult time of hearing God's Word correctly. Whenever an interpretation of a certain passage becomes normative for a particular fellowship and is passed on as authoritative, one dare not question orthodoxy for fear of excommunication. Tradition frequently stands in the way of one's listening anew to the biblical text.

Jesus Versus Satan

Just a casual glance from Matthew's Gospel also reveals a scenario between Jesus and Satan in which a similar situation took place—the pitting of one Scripture against another Scripture. In this scene, which describes the temptation of Jesus, one observes Satan citing a Scripture to Jesus to give so-called validity to his request. Yes, Satan, too, sought to cancel out one Scripture with another Scripture. In the temptation of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew (**4:1-11**), one observes Satan's use of **Psalm 91:11-12**. But his application of this Scripture made the psalmist say something that he certainly did not say. Satan's handling of **Psalm 91:11-12** contradicts **Deuteronomy 6:16**. Satan sets one Scripture against another, but Jesus corrected his misapplication. Even today, many churches practice this same strategy of invalidating one Scripture with another Scripture. But this practice of misapplication of biblical texts is on a much larger scale within the various churches scattered throughout the world, not just the fellowship that I grew up in. Scriptures are frequently cited in such a way that it makes the Bible say what it does not say. The traditional interpretation of **James 2:14-25** can be clarified by comparing other pertinent passages. One should never press into a passage a thought that contradicts another passage.

Unraveling the Apparent Discrepancies Between

James and Paul

As one seeks to unravel the apparent contradiction between Paul and James, one must bear in mind that Paul and James do not stand face-to-face but rather back-to-back. In other words, they are fighting different enemies, not each other. Paul talks about the "root" of faith, but James, on the other hand, talks about the "fruit" of faith. One is dealing with legalism and the other is dealing with antinomianism. When James writes about works, he writes about works of faith, not works of Law. The faith that saves is the faith that produces works. As one carefully reads these two books—Romans and James—one quickly observes that both James and Paul stress that Christianity must be ethically demonstrated. Paul places emphasis upon grace and faith in the initial act of justification, but James, on the other hand, stresses action and works after one's justification by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. One can summarize both Paul and James by saying that it is faith alone that justifies, but the faith that justifies is not alone. Dynamic faith involves the whole man. The faith that saves will produce good works.

In the words of William Barclay, "The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works."[18] Vernon McGee is also helpful in his comments: "James is not talking about the works of the Law. He simply says that the faith which saves you will produce works, works of faith. The faith that James is talking about here is professing faith, that which is phony and counterfeit."[19] On the one hand, Paul speaks of saving faith: "a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be

justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (**Galatians 2:16**). Yet, on the other hand, Paul writes about works, in this same epistle, in the life of one who is put right with God through faith in

Jesus: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (**6:9**). Earlier in Galatians, Paul also wrote about the works of the flesh and the consequences of such unethical behavior:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**5:19-21**).

Then Paul illustrates the positive aspects of good works in the life of every believer:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (**5:22-25**).

Both Paul and James taught that faith must be a working faith. Again, McGee correctly states: "Now James deals with the identification of faith. Saving faith can be recognized and identified by certain spiritual fingerprints."[20] The following citation from Barclay is worth citing, which illustrates the preceding comments with pungent clarity:

> What James is arguing against is the first kind of belief, the acceptance of a fact without allowing it to have any influence upon life. The devils are intellectually convinced of the existence of God; they, in fact, tremble before him; but their belief does not alter them in the slightest. What Paul held was the second kind of belief. For him to believe in Jesus meant to take that belief into every section of life and to live by it.
>
> It is easy to pervert Paulinism and to emasculate *believe* of all effective meaning; and it is not really Paulinism but a misunderstood form of it that James condemns. He is condemning profession without practice and with that condemnation Paul would have entirely agreed.
>
> (iii) Even allowing for that, there is still a difference between James and Paul—*they begin at different times in the Christian life*. Paul begins *at the very beginning*. He insists that no man can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God; a man can only accept the forgiveness which God offers him in Jesus Christ.
>
> James begins much later *with the professing Christian*, the man who claims to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God. Such a man, James rightly says, must live a new life for he is a new creature. He has been *justified*; he must now show that he is *sanctified*. With that Paul would have entirely agreed.
>
> The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works. By far the best analogy is that of a great human love. He who is loved is certain that he does not deserve to be loved;

> but he is also certain that he must spend his life trying to be worthy of that love.
> The difference between James and Paul is a difference of starting-point. Paul starts with the great basic fact of the forgiveness of God which no man can earn or deserve; James starts with the professing Christian and insists that a man must prove, his Christianity by his deeds. We are not saved by deeds; we are saved for deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. Paul's emphasis is on the first and James' is on the second. In fact they do not contradict but complement each other; and the message of both is essential to the Christian faith in its fullest form.[21]

As one seeks to unravel the twisting of **James 2:14-25**, it is advantageous to add the thoughts of many others in analyzing this pericope that is so frequently misapplied in order to uphold a denial of Paul's affirmation about salvation by faith apart from works of Law. Once more, Warren W. Wiersbe, another witness, is to the point when he writes: "Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration. That kind of faith is dead."[22] Kent Hughes is also on target when he writes:

> What about works? We may ask. The answer was given by Christ to some good-deeds Jews: "The work of god is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). The unregenerate heart thinks of works first as it desires salvation. But Jesus says the first "work" is to believe. After this, a true faith works and works and works and works."[23]

Again, Hughes goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "Paul's teaching about faith and works focuses on the time *before* conversion, and James' focus is *after* conversion."[24]

As one reflects upon the entire Book of Galatians, one discovers that it is not a case of either faith or works, but rather it is a case of both faith and works in the scheme of redemption. But, on the other hand, faith is the channel by which God imputes His righteousness. This righteousness is not received from God through works, but through faith. To rephrase the preceding thoughts again, one can say that one is not saved *by* works but *for* works. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul expresses this concept:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

As stated above, faith involves the whole man. Paul in writing to Titus also expresses this same truth about salvation and works. He writes about God's grace and its implications in the lives of God's people:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-

controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. [15] These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:9-15**).

Paul immediately encourages Titus to remind the people to do what is good. But, at the same time, Paul was also careful to state how a person is put in a right relationship with God. Listen once more to Paul as he develops his thoughts to Titus:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, [2] to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. [3] At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. [4] But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. [8] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**3:1-8**).

CHAPTER 6

A Man Reaps What He Sows

6:7-10

As one reaches the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Galatians, one observes that he stresses the ethical implications resulting from salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In **chapter 5**, he condemns the works of the flesh and advocates works of the Spirit if one wishes eternal life. In his final remarks (**chapter 6**), he again issues a warning about ungodly behavior and, at the same time, encourages all believers to do good works:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. [8] The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature [a] will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. [9] Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. [10] Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (**Galatians 6:7-10**).

CONCLUSION

The Book of Galatians is Christocentric, that is to say Christ centered. In this short Epistle, Paul answers the question: How can a man/woman be justified and acceptable before a holy God? Paul responds by saying that God accomplished this marvelous feat through the cross of Christ. For Paul salvation is only possible through the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, this Epistle is full of the cross of Christ. Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for one's salvation. One is not justified by works, but rather through faith in Jesus (**Galatians 2:16**). Nothing can be added to the work of Christ. If one could be saved through his/her own merits (law keeping), then Christ died for nothing (**2:21**). Salvation is a free gift and man can add nothing to it. Thus, Paul vehemently advances salvation by faith alone. Thus, for Paul, the Galatians belonged to the "family of believers" (**6:10**).

Paul refused to tolerate any system that undermines the truth of the Gospel. Faith is the factor that unites us with God's community, not a perfect understanding of the Bible. In the final phase of this Book, Paul calls attention to how every individual becomes a child of God: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**3:26**). Paul refuses to put up with any teaching that is contrary or inconsistent with faith as the means of justification. In another epistle (Romans), Paul tells the Romans that the Righteousness that comes from God begins with faith and ends with faith (**Romans 1:16-17**). Paul even took Peter to task when he withdrew table-fellowship from the uncircumcised Gentile believers. It is not uncommon for Christians, even today, to withdraw fellowship from other believers over the manner of distribution of the bread in the Lord's Supper, the number of containers used to distribute the fruit of the vine, the employment of the class method of conducting Bible studies, kitchens in church buildings, the distribution of funds collected on Sunday morning, the support of Bible colleges or universities from monies collected on Sunday morning, whether one can or cannot employ an instrument in praise to God during a so-called worship service, and so on. For many, within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus the correct interpretation upon certain Scriptures that coincides with the status quo of a particular party.

Finally, Paul addresses the subject of holiness after justification by faith. Evidently, there were some who put forth the belief that if one is saved by grace then it does not matter how one lives. But in response to this philosophy, Paul says that it does matter. Even though Christians have been freed from the Law as a means of justification, still one is not free to break the Law. Paul expresses it this way:

> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. [14] The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] [15] If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (**Galatians 5:13-15**).

God's people are to seek to "live by the Spirit" (**5:16**), and to be "led by the Spirit" (**5:18**). Paul encourages every believer to "keep in step with the Spirit" (**5:25**). God wants His children to bear fruit that is pleasing to Himself (**5:22-25**). Having said all this, nevertheless, he still closed this Epistle with reference to salvation that is made available in and through Jesus Christ by His cross. The last words of this Epistle read:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (**6:18**). The answer to salvation can be nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

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[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christians Freedom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 161.

[3] Ibid., 161, 162.

[4] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 126.

[5] See John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 93, for an excellent treatment of the giving of God's Law to Moses. I am indebted to Stott for his insightful comments about the Law's purpose.

[6] John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downer Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 117.

[7] Ibid., 103, 104.

[8] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 123-124.

[9] Ibid., 126.

[10] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christians Freedom*, 150.

[11] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One* Way, 233.

[12] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 156.

[13] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of* Galatians: Only One Way, 140.

[14]William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 45.

[15] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of* Galatians: Only One Way, 143.

[16] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 165.

[17] Ibid.

[18] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 74.

[19] J. Vernon McGee, "James" in *Through the Bible: First Corinthians Through Revelation*, Volume 5 (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1983), 649.

[20] Ibid., 650.

[21] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 73, 74.

[22] Warren W. Wiersbe, "James" in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire "Be" Series* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 354.

[23] R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 112.

[24] Ibid., 108.

The Gospel Announced in Advance to Abraham

Thrust Statement: **The Gospel preached to Abraham involved God's methodology of Justification—"God would justify the Gentiles by faith."**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 3:8**

What is the Gospel of Christ? Within many of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ, one discovers that the basic definition of Gospel is associated with the twenty-seven books called the New Testament. Just recently, this author listened to an editor of a very well known Christian journal advance the concept that the Gospel is the New Testament. As a young preacher, this author also taught that the Gospel consisted of twenty-seven books. As a result of this mindset, this writer castigated every believer that did not agree with the particular faction of which he was identified. Ultimately, this meaning of the word *Gospel* boils down to the fact that many associate their understanding of the New Testament on par with the Gospel.

One of the first Scriptures that I memorized as a young Christian came from Galatians 1:6-9. Twice in this short pericope, the apostle pronounces a curse upon anyone who preaches another gospel other than the Gospel he preaches. Paul went so far as to even mention angels. Even if an angel preached any other gospel, one should let the angel be anathema. Thus, one can understand why so much emphasis is placed upon this section of Scripture.

Many interpreters find meanings in the text that is really not there, but rather the meaning found in one's own mind. If one is to understand correctly the meaning of the word *Gospel* as utilized by Paul, one must consult the context. In order for one to get the feel, as it were, for this particular word, then one must read the entire book in one sitting. One must endeavor to understand the text's theological meaning within the

book itself. Many Christians jump into the text without any thought of what the author intended to convey with his use of the word *Gospel.*

Paul defines the word *Gospel* in verse four of chapter one of Galatians—"Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age (1:4, NIV). Paul opposed Peter when he failed to set forth the nature of the Gospel when he withdrew from the Gentiles. Some of the brethren insisted upon obedience to circumcision as prerequisite to salvation, other than faith alone in Jesus (2:1-21). In the course of this conversation, Paul draws attention to the fact that the Gospel is about how one is put in a right relationship with God. For instance, he stresses that the Gospel is about justification by faith (2:15-17), not justification by law.

Paul sought to solidify his arguments by reflecting upon Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (3:6). Then Paul drops the bombshell, as it were, in calling attention to the very heart of the Gospel: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (3:8). How did this blessing occur? Paul says, "The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ" (3:16).

Two thousand years prior to Paul's writing the Book of Galatians, God announced the Gospel to Abraham. If one assigns the traditional definition to the word *Gospel*, one must naturally conclude, according to many Christians within the Churches of Christ, that God spoke to Moses about *a cappella* singing versus instrumental music, the so-called sinfulness of Sunday school, the use of grape juice versus wine in the Lord's Supper, the organization of the church, the so-called church treasury, order of worship—five acts (rituals) to be performed in a prescribed manner—and so on. No! The Gospel preached to Abraham set forth the justification of sinful humanity through faith in God's Son. The Gospel is "good news" about what Christ accomplished for sinful humanity. When Jesus died upon the cross, He achieved for man what man could not complete for himself. The Gospel preached to Abraham involved God's methodology of justification—"God would justify the Gentiles by faith."

The Heart of the Gospel:

Galatians 1:6-9

Thrust Statement: **The Gospel is the good news about salvation through faith in Christ.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 1:6-9**

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned![1]

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this essay is to capture the heart of the gospel of Christ, that is to say, the substance of the good news of God. In order for one to identify the gospel of God, one must first understand what the gospel is all about. The question is: What is the gospel? Is it the twenty-seven books called the New Testament? Or is it the good news about a method of salvation through faith, not works? When Paul speaks of the gospel in his letter to the churches in the province of Galatia, just what does he refer to? An answer to this most important question is essential for unity among God's people. Unless believers correctly identify the gospel, then unity will not exist as a whole among the saints.[2]

Christians frequently identify the gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. In other words, if you participate in the use of individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper, then you are preaching another gospel. If you sing with the accompaniment of an instrument, then you are preaching another gospel.

If you participate in teaching children and adults in a Bible study, separate and apart from the regular Sunday service, then you are preaching another gospel. If you accept Bible colleges as okay, then you are preaching another gospel. This list is almost ad infinitum. Carl Ketcherside wrote, almost thirty-five years ago, about the evils arising from one's failure to differentiate between gospel and doctrine. He says,

Those who mistake unity with conformity and who predicate fellowship upon endorsement, brand as "another gospel" every view, opinion and interpretation, which is divergent from their own. Under the fallacious notion that every religious concept which they enunciate is "gospel" they pronounce an anathema upon every person who dares to question their orthodox procedures in any respect. Thus they splinter the family into fragments unless all are willing to make them the inviolable and inerrant interpreters of the sacred oracles.[3]

The following is a classic example of how sincere Christians abuse **Galatians 1:8-9**. On September 25, 1996, Ray Dutton wrote a letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ concerning their employment of Buddy Bell as their pulpit minister. In this letter he cites **Galatians 1:8-9** for his justification for his tongue-lashing of the Landmark elders. In this letter, he names many doctrinal issues—baptism, instrumental music, denominationalism, solos, choirs, quartets and other special music, the role of women in the church, fellowship with the denominations—that he takes issue with Bell. Dutton cites **Galatians 1:8-9** to justify his rejection of Bell and the elders at the Landmark church. He accuses Bell of preaching another gospel since Bell accepts fellowship with the denominations. He explains:

> Did not Paul tell us, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let hem be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8-9)[4]

As observed above, Kevin Presley—one-cup and non-Sunday school—also cites **Galatians 1:8-9** to condemn men like Ray Dutton as well as Buddy Bell. There are approximately twenty-five divisions (some say more) that claim this citation as their own unique property. Leroy Garrett calls attention to this much-abused passage by going right to the heart of another gospel:

> It was a gospel that destroyed that grace through the introduction of Jewish rites and ceremonies as essential to salvation. . . . What the Judaizers proclaimed was perverted in that it made salvation a matter of law and works rather than faith and grace. . . . Any message that bases justification on anything but the merits of the Lord Jesus is a perversion, and that was the problem in Galatia. Paul concedes that "if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law." This could never be, so Jesus Christ was given as the sin-bearer to those that believe.[5]

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of

his/her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One's interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose one's own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations (**Galatians 1:6-9**).

One cannot just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. Everyone is to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. One needs to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this essay will assist one's understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions; one must guard against his/her interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Word of God afresh.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In order for one to ascertain the full import of the word *gospel*, one should seek to understand the word as employed by Paul in his missionary journeys. An observation of his speeches during his first missionary travels should shed some light on Paul's understanding of what the "gospel" of God is all about. To begin this investigation, this study will travel with Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark on the first missionary voyage. Then, this research will listen in on the Jerusalem conference that occurred between the first and second missionary journeys of Paul in order to see if there is any hint from the various speakers as to what the gospel of God is relating to. Then, an observation of two of Paul's letters—Romans and Galatians—will be called forth as evidence to determine if there is any hint as to the nature of the gospel. These two letters were probably written during Paul's third missionary journey.

First Missionary Journey (46—48 CE)

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark set sail from Seleucia (15 miles SW of Antioch of Syria) to the island of Cyprus.[6] Immediately upon their arrival at Salamis (approximately 135 Miles SW of Seleucia), Luke informs his readers about the proclamation of the good news upon their arrival on the island of Cyprus: "they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues" (**Acts 13:5**). Next, Luke records that they went to Paphos (83 miles SW of Salamis). Upon their arrival, Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, sent for Paul and Barnabas because he wanted to hear the word of God (**13:7**). Thus far, one knows that they preached the word of God. But what did they say when they preached the word of God? Did they preach that God had ordained a worship service with five-acts to be performed in a prescribed manner? Did they talk about "bread-pinching" instead of "bread-breaking" in the observance of the Lord's Supper? Did they talk about singing *a cappella* instead of singing with an instrument? Just what did they broadcast? The answer to these questions can be found in their stop in Pisidian Antioch (275 Miles NW of Paphos).

Pisidian Antioch

This visit of Paul and Barnabas is a little more descriptive of the "word of God." Luke tells his readers that they entered the synagogue and proclaimed Jesus (see **13:13-38** for the whole of this message). After giving a brief history of God's involvement in the nations of Israel, Paul proclaims that the history of salvation reaches its climax in Jesus as God's way of salvation. He declares to the Jews and the Gentiles who worship God: "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (**13:32**). Now, Paul begins to define this message of redemption: "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (**13:38-39**). After proclaiming God's method of justification, the Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region (**13:50-51**). What is the heart of the Gospel? It is forgiveness through Jesus.

Missionary Work in Iconium

Following their work in Pisidian Antioch, they traveled to Iconium (approximately 71 miles SE of Antioch). Again, arriving at Iconium, they went into the Jewish synagogue to announce justification by grace through faith in Jesus. Many Jews and Gentiles believed, but, on the other hand, there were many Jews who refused to accept God's way of justification and "stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers" (**14:2**). When Luke records that many Jews and Gentiles believed, one cannot help but wonder *what* it was that they believed. One can discover *what* they believed by reflecting upon Luke's statement concerning the work in Pisidian Antioch: "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (**13:38**). This is the very heart of the gospel of God.

Lystra and Derbe

While in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas learned of a plot "to mistreat them and stone them" (**14:5**). They then "fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra (14 miles S of Iconium) and Derbe (46 miles SE of Lystra) and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news" (**14:6-7**). The Jewish hatred for the "good news" of God stretched from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium to Lystra (87 miles SE of Pisidian Antioch). Luke writes: "Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead" (**14:19**).

Following this incident in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe. Upon their arrival, they began to preach the good news. Luke captures the essence of their ministry in few words: "They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples" (**14:21**). They then retraced their steps through the towns of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (**14:21**). In spite of strong opposition from the Jews, Luke says that the disciples were encouraged to remain true to the faith (**14:22**), that is to say, the good news about God's way of salvation by faith, not works. Having accomplished what they could for the cause of Christ, they continued their journey back to Antioch of Syria. Upon their arrival, they shared with the brethren how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (**14:27**).

The Council at Jerusalem

Following this 1,158-mile trip, Paul and Barnabas found themselves involved in a controversy over the necessity of circumcision. Luke announces: "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved'" (**15:1**). If the brothers from Judea left Jerusalem, one can quickly see the zeal that these men had for the Law of Moses. They traveled approximately 311 miles—if from Jerusalem—to deal with the issue of circumcision and its relationship to salvation, as they perceived it. This position brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute with these brethren (**15:2**). This belief system was a perversion of "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (**Jude 3**). This fervor over circumcision as a condition of salvation undermined the good news that justification is through faith, not works of the Law.

The church at Antioch of Syria sent Paul and Barnabas along with some other believers to Jerusalem to discuss this matter of how a man is put in a right relationship with God (**Acts 15:2**). The big question that the leaders discussed was how to be saved. Luke begins the events of this meeting by saying: "When they (Paul & Barnabas) came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them" (**15:1**). Next, Luke records: "Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (**15:5**). Since some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees were presenting "another gospel," then "The apostles and elders met to consider this question" (**15:6**).

After Paul, Barnabas, and some of the Pharisees' party spoke, Peter stood up and addressed the group:

> Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are (**15:7-11**).

The gospel message is about the purification of the heart by faith. In other words, the message of the gospel is about salvation by grace through faith. Then, Paul and Barnabas spoke again "about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them" (**15:12**). Next, James, our Lord's brother quoted from the prophet Amos to prove that the Gentiles were to be received into the fellowship of the saints through faith, not through law (**15:13-21**). This analysis of Paul's and Barnabas's first missionary journey brings one to consider two letters written by Paul to correct the perversion of the gospel of Christ by the Jews.

Letter to the Galatians

Peter's words concerning justification—"he purified their hearts by faith"—is Peter's way of saying what Paul affirmed in his letter to the Christians in the province of Galatia—Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul goes right to the heart of the gospel with the following words:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**Galatians 2:15-16**).

"Justified by faith in Christ" is the heart of the gospel. This is why Paul could say:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (**1:6-10**).

Paul turns his attention to Abraham as an example of justification by faith. But in setting up this scenario, he asks questions about their receiving the Spirit to press home the heart of the gospel.

> You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? **(Galatians 3:1-5**)

From this turn of argument, Paul then addresses Abraham's justification as well as the Christians of all nations, which includes the Christians of southern Galatia. Listen to Paul as he develops his point of view as to what the gospel of God is all about:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**3:6-9**).

The gospel is the good news that God will justify man through faith, not works. If any man, even an angel, proclaims any method of justification other than through faith in Jesus, then Paul says let that man or angel be accursed.

Letter to the Romans

The letter of Paul to the Romans is also about the gospel of God. Paul goes right to the heart of the gospel with the following weighty words:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:16-17**).

For Paul, justification by faith is the essence of the gospel message. Faith is the means by which justification is received, not its basis. Paul amplifies this theme of "justification by faith" in his letter to the Romans:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (**3:21-28**).

Paul could not compromise the gospel of God with another gospel which is not another. In the tenth chapter of Romans, Paul details the mistakes the Israelites made concerning their understanding about how man receives the righteousness that belongs to God. He states emphatically that the Jews "are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (**10:2-3**). The Holy Spirit, through Paul, reveals, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**10:4**). Justification by faith is the gospel that Paul preached to the Romans and it is also the gospel that Paul preached to the churches of Galatia.

CONCLUSION

The "another gospel" in **Galatians 1:6-9** is the teaching that faith in Jesus is not sufficient for salvation. It is faith—plus something else that is classified as another gospel. Many within the Churches of Christ preach another gospel which is not another. The gospel must be interpreted in light of its context, not one's presuppositions. Remember, the gospel, by etymology, is good news that God has reached down and saved those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. It is not a blueprint of doctrine, a code of ethics, or an outlook of life. It is good news about Jesus and what

He accomplished for men and women in their impotent state, their ill-fated condition, and their unfortunate circumstances. Again, what is the gospel? Jesus explains the gospel this way in His conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

When believers in Christ make the common cup in communion, Sunday schools, instrumental music, solos, hand-clapping, fellowship halls, and so on, the criterion of salvation, then they hinge justification upon faith in Christ PLUS SOMETHING ELSE. This "something else" is "another gospel" in **Galatians 1:6-9**. Faith is the belief of facts related to Christ; it is not the grasping of abstract truths that justifies one before God. When one proposes a program of justification by knowledge, then that person hangs himself/herself upon the gallows he/she has constructed to rid oneself of others, unless one is prepared to say that he/she knows as much as God.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] See Kevin W. Presley, "Neo-Denominationalism in the Church of Christ," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 1, where he declares:

> The stream of DENOMINATIONALISM is indeed seeping into the Church of Christ. The words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-7 are certainly timely: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; Which is not another, but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert he gospel of Christ." It is a worthy thing that we notice some of these modern assaults on the bulwarks of our faith.

See also Don L. King, Editorial, "Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where King expresses his views about those who disagree with him over the use of individual communion cups and Sunday school. He writes:

> Listen, brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. . . . If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? (Sic).

[3] Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 1 (January 1965): 1.

[4] Ray Dutton, “To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ,:” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 3.

[5] Leroy Garrett, *Restoration Review* 17, no. 3 (March 1975): 42.

[6] A large island in NE Mediterranean, about 60 miles (96 km) W of the Syrian coast and 40 miles (64 km) S of the coast of Cilicia (modern Turkey).

Until Christ is Formed in You

Thrust Statement: **Paul wants Christians to understand the Gospel so that Christ can be formed in them.**

Scripture Reading: **Luke 2:10-11; Galatians 4:19**

Understanding the Gospel of God

"Until Christ is formed in you" is pregnant with meaning. In the context of Galatians, it appears that this phrase is primarily used in reference to an adequate understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world. On the other hand, some commentators look at the ethical aspects of the Christian life as the meaning of this weighty phrase. Both positions are viable interpretations, even though, in this writer's opinion, the emphasis is not upon the ethical teachings of Jesus but upon a perception of the Gospel of God. This essay discusses both alternatives as viable options in the life of every believer.[1] Many of the Galatians did not get the picture of the Gospel and were preaching another way of salvation other than faith in Jesus. In the Gospel, it is God who takes the burden of sin upon Himself. God alone, in and through the Cross of Christ, is the one who atones for the sins of humanity. The **Book of Galatians** is a defense of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ for the sins of humanity.

How can one receive the benefits of this sacrifice offered by God? Paul carefully develops faith as the means whereby individuals receive the blessings of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. For Paul, it is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin separating individuals from God is removed. It is only in Jesus that God has broken down the barriers raised by guilt. As one reflects upon the **Book of Galatians**, one quickly realizes that God links humanity to Himself in peace and reconciliation through belief (faith) in the One who atones for the sins of humanity. One cannot approach God directly but only through the Mediator (**1 Timothy 2:5**; **John 14:6**). Without faith in Jesus one cannot have eternal life (**John 3:36**).[2] Just a perusal of this

Book reveals that many did not understand the full implications of the Gospel of God. As a result of this lack of comprehension, Christ was not formed in them.

Many were relying upon something other than faith in Jesus for salvation. Even today, this mentality is still true within many Christian fellowships. Countless Christians are still basing their salvation upon the meticulous details of a so-called worship service, not upon Christ. Some still do not understand that communion with God the Father is only possible through the mediation of Jesus, not through observance of a law code—a code that today is even more stringent than the Old Testament Law, at least according to some Christians. Without a proper discernment of the Gospel, one can say that Christ is still not formed within many. As long as one is relying upon absolute faithfulness to another way of salvation other than faith in Jesus, Christ cannot be formed in that individual. God's Gospel is about what happened in Jesus, which event flows from eternity, that is to say, it belongs to eternity and it leads to eternity (**Ephesians 1:4**). Salvation is all of God in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Cross (**Colossians 1:21-22**). It is only in and through Jesus that the soul can be reunited to God. Jesus is the only way to God. This is what the Gospel of God is all about.

The Gospel of God is about God's love. It is in and through the Gospel that God's love takes hold of everyone in Christ. For Paul, one can only be found in His free grace in Jesus. God's whole revelation is about His coming down to humanity in and through His One and only Son. In other words, God, through Jesus, enters the world of sinful humanity. As one looks at the Cross of Jesus, one looks at the Holiness of God with His mercy. It is in and through the Cross of Jesus that one sees the righteousness of God combined with His justice and mercy. The Jews were looking for another way of salvation other than faith in Jesus. The Gospel played such an important part in redemption that Paul could write with forcefulness:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (**Galatians 1:6-9**)! [3]

If one is to understand this section of Scripture, one must understand these verses in light of their context. The Judaizers had infiltrated the Christian community and were requiring something other than faith in Jesus as the way of salvation (see also **Romans 10:1-17**). It was Christ plus something else (see also **Acts 15:1-12**). They were not relying upon the finished (perfected) work of Christ upon the Cross for their salvation. Even today, this Scripture citation (**1:6-9**) is still cited by many well-meaning Christians to give validity to their separation from other Christians who do not conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy. Ostracism of other Christians is based on the belief that they are preaching another Gospel. In other words, the Gospel is frequently associated with various interpretations of New Testament texts. For example, some associate the Gospel with the following beliefs: (1) one cup in the

observance of the Lord's Supper, (2) the manner in which the bread is used in the Lord's Supper (break or pinch), (3) the use of grape juice in the Lord's Supper (not wine), (4) accapella singing (not instrumental), and so on. It is not uncommon for the Gospel to be associated with the so-called correct view set forth by some segments within the Christian community. But is this kind of interpretation legitimate in light of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians? Many Christians are preaching another gospel, which is not the Gospel of God.

In the Jerusalem conference, Peter boldly defended the acceptance of the Gentiles upon the basis of faith: "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith" (**Acts 15:9**). Again, Peter, in his closing remarks, addresses the *what* of the Gospel of God, that is, what the Gospel is all about: "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (**15:11**). In the churches of Galatia, many were endeavoring to teach another way of purification other than faith in Him. If one wishes to determine the meaning of the word *Gospel*, the best place to settle on the meaning is the context—verses before and after **1:6-9**. Prior to Paul pronouncing a curse upon anyone who preaches another Gospel, he defines this word *Gospel* just a few verses before his warning about preaching another Gospel:

> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

What is the Gospel? It is about Christ having given Himself for the sins of humanity in order to rescue men and women from this evil age. For Paul, it is in Jesus that this new aeon with its salvation has dawned. Forgiveness actually takes place in and through Him, nothing else. Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. In the Gospel, one perceives the mercy of God at the place of horror—the Cross of Jesus on Calvary. It is in the Cross that God comes to sinful humanity. It is only at the Cross that individuals see fully what it is that separates him or her from God, namely, sin. It is in Jesus that one understands that he or she is no longer separated from God. In the Cross of Jesus, one sees the reality of God's wrath. Unless one is conscious of God's wrath, one will not take his or her sins seriously. God's Divine wrath is a Divine reaction against sin and guilt. It is in Christ that God has revealed Himself. The message of the Cross of Jesus is the mystery of the Gospel of God—Jesus is God's Way of salvation. One can say that Jesus is the gift and act of God. God sent Him, God gave Him, and God gave Him up. The Gospel is about Jesus the God-Man. It is in Jesus that one encounters the Eternal God.

The word *Gospel* appears twelve times in this short Epistle.[4] The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for both men and women in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is Good News of justification by faith for sinful humanity. This means of right standing before God is by God's grace (**Ephesians 2:8-9**).[5] Again, one can say that the Gospel is the Good News for dying sinners that God promises them eternal life in and through Jesus by faith, not works. The Good News is that God furnishes His own righteousness—a righteousness that is supplied by God, a righteousness that is devised by God, and a righteousness that is made available by God through faith in His Son (**Romans 1:16-17**). Six times the word *Gospel* appears in the first chapter of Galatians.

Just a casual glance of the employment of this word in the **Book of Galatians** reveals the meaning of this word.

Prior to reading Paul's statement "Until Christ is formed in you" (**Galatians 4:19**), Paul sets forth what the Gospel is all about, namely, Christ. In **1:6**, Paul writes: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel." In **1:4**, as mentioned earlier, Paul unravels for the reader the meaning of the word *Gospel*. Some of the Galatians were turning from the Gospel to another gospel, a gospel that Paul says is not the Gospel: "which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ" (**1:7**). In this verse, Paul employs the word *gospel* twice. Paul is combating a system of salvation that does not rest entirely upon the finished work of Christ for one's salvation.

This preaching of another gospel other than the Gospel of Christ receives strong condemnation from the apostle: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (**1:8**)! Paul employs the words *preach* and *preached* in this verse. Some were preaching a gospel that was not the same as Paul preached. This departure from the true Gospel receives a double warning: "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (**1:9**)! What was Paul preaching? One should turn again to **verse four** of this **same chapter**: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age."

As noted above, Paul calls attention to his preaching the Gospel. Now in **1:11**, he calls awareness to the source of his Gospel: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up." Paul is laboring the point of what he preached to the Gentiles. Fourteen years after his conversion, he recalls how he went up to Jerusalem and "set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles" (**2:2**). Over and over again Paul draws notice to his preaching the Gospel. The word *gospel* and the word *faith* are sometimes employed in the Book as synonymous. For example, in **1:23**, Paul writes: "They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'" Paul had to rebuke Peter and others who were teaching things that undermined the "truth of the Gospel": "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (**2:5**).

"Preaching the gospel" (**1:9**) is equivalent to "preaching the faith" (**1:23**) and "preaching the faith" is equivalent to "I might preach him among the Gentiles" (**1:16**). When one peaches Jesus (**1:16**), one is "preaching the faith" (**1:23**). Paul set forth "the truth of the gospel" (**2:5**) when Peter and others were not acting in harmony with the Gospel Paul preached. Paul rebuked Peter when he and the others were "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (**2:14**). Paul adds a significant statement to the reaction of those with whom he met concerning the Gospel that he had received from God: "Those men added nothing to my message. [7] On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles,[a] just as Peter had been to the Jews" (**2:6, 7**). In the course of this confrontation, Paul rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy:

> [14] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs (**2:14**)?

This Scripture citation (**2:14**) is the tenth time that Paul has mentioned the word *Gospel* in this short Epistle. Why did Paul rebuke Peter and the rest for their "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel"? They were teaching that something else was essential to salvation, not just faith in the finished work of Christ. Again, Paul zeros in on the nature of the Gospel when he writes:

> "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**2:15-16**).

How is one justified before God? Paul states plainly that it is "by faith in Jesus Christ." This section of Scripture coincides with what Paul says in **1:4**. The **Book of Galatians** unfolds the Gospel of God in very clear terms. One of the most significant verses in this Book is found in the third chapter:

> The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**3:8-9**).

Again, one may ask, how are individuals justified before God? Once more, Paul goes right to the core of justification: "God would justify the Gentiles by faith." In **3:8**, Paul employs the word *Gospel* for the eleventh time. Two thousand years before the Incarnation, God preached "the gospel in advance to Abraham." What did he preach to him? Was it accapella singing? Was it one cup for the Lord's Supper? Was it about the Sunday collection (cannot collect money on any day except Sunday)? Was it about how to share the bread in the Lord's Supper—break or pinch? Was it about grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper? Was it about a baptistry versus running water for baptism? Was it about kitchens in the church building? Was it about Bible colleges? Just what was the Gospel that was preached to Abraham? The Gospel consisted in this: "All nations will be blessed through you." How? Christ came through the seed of Abraham.

The Gospel of God is about justification. How is one justified before God? Is it by works of the Law (any law) or by faith in Jesus? When one fails to walk according to the truth of the Gospel, he or she is relying upon other means of salvation other than faith alone. Paul clearly states: "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (**2:16**). Faith in Christ is the only means of a right standing before God: "We, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law" (**2:16**). How are individuals justified before God? Listen to Paul once more as he zeros in on the cause of justification: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in

advance to Abraham" (**3:8**). This Gospel announced Jesus as God's Way of salvation. Paul continues this line of reasoning about the Gospel when he writes: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"[a] meaning one person, who is Christ" (**3:16**).

Indisputable Historical Fact

As one reflects upon the Gospel of God, one can hardly fail to recall the words of the angel to the shepherds concerning the birth of Christ. This announcement is the Good News of God concerning God's message of salvation for lost humanity. Pay attention to the words of the angel as he speaks of "good tidings of great joy": "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ[a] the Lord" (**Luke 2:10-11**). In the Incarnation, Jesus came into a world of carnage. Just a casual reading of the life and times of people in the first century reveals that this world was a world of terror. It was a rough, hard, and brutal world. The words of the angel were addressed, as it were, to this evil and horrifying world. God sent One to be the savior of the world. This One came to give hope and peace to all who put their trust in Him. The answer to one's fears can only be found in Jesus who is Christ the Lord.

"Be not afraid" sinks deep into the modern society. The modern world, as well as the world then, is full of terror. The real world is a most fearful world, not an idealized Christian world. Since the birth of Christ, the world has not become less fearsome. Individuals still live in a world of horror. There is no escape from this nightmare of fright. As one reflects upon the words of the angel, this narrative strikes one's ears as if the announcement is far away. As both men and women witness the present war with Iraq, this announcement from the angel appears almost as a legend to the modern ear. The world at large is at war with God. This message, at this time, seems almost out of place. Yet, at this time of the year, one hears the story of Jesus told from one church to another church. The words of the angel ring out during the Christmas season.

At first glance, it appears that the horrors of the world and the message of the angel do not go together. The angel announces a real historical event—the Incarnation. The Gospels paint a picture of Jesus that reveals His humanity as well as His Deity (the pre-existence of the *Logos*). It is unquestionable that Jesus was born. The testimony of the Evangelist reveals that He grew up as a carpenter's son in Nazareth of Galilee, alongside of four brothers and some sisters. The birth of Jesus is an indisputable historical fact. You will not find in the history books of the world that Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior of the world. You will not find in the chronicles of humanity, except Christianity, that God became flesh in order to redeem lost humanity. You will not discover in the writings of history that eternal light broke into the darkness of humanity. Yet, the eternal world of God disclosed itself in the Christ event.

In the days of Jesus, God came to visit this world of sin. His birth is still a mystery to the world at large. Many still cannot grasp His life, His death, and His resurrection. These historical events still baffle the mind of the unbeliever. The unique event of His death as an Atonement for the redemption of the whole world still

mystifies the atheist. One can search world history, but one will never find anything of this magnitude that has such a decisive significance for all eternity. All the basic events of the world come to an end and are swallowed up in the nothingness of death. In other words, there is nothing in the secular archives of history that leads from the historical events of world history into eternity with the God of creation. History for the world is simply one event in time; world history is simply a series of events that is purely the outcome of other events. There is no meaning to history as found in the Bible.

The message of the angel is in contrast to the philosophy of history by the world. What happened in Jesus Christ flows from eternity. As stated earlier, Jesus belongs to eternity and He leads to eternity. Because of this fact, John could write: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning" (**John 1:1-2**). It is in the same vein that Jesus prays to the Father: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**17:5**). Paul also writes: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he[a] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (**Ephesians 1:4-5**).

In world history one does not find anything of this element. This happening is one of the most significant events to transpire in the records of this world. In the birth of Christ, eternity entered time, and Christ has offered eternity to all who confess Him as Lord. It is only in Jesus that the life of joy and peace can be experienced. God entered into a new covenant relationship with His creatures, a covenant sealed with the blood of the Son of God and made valid for all eternity. As a result of this new covenant, those who respond to God's gift to sinful humanity (Jesus Christ) are made heirs of divine glory and enjoy the fullness of eternal life. This covenant remains valid for all eternity. Nothing can cancel this new relationship created by God through His Son. Paul seeks to grasp the love of God as he seeks to capture the depth of God's love through Christ:

> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[d] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, [39] neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:38-39**).

Is it any wonder that Paul could write: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, [20] how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you" (**Galatians 4:19-20**)! How do Christians know this? They know this because Jesus is more than man; they also know this because Jesus is the Word of the eternal God Himself. What happened two thousand years ago is still decisive for today. This confidence is solidified in and through Jesus. Eternal life is given to anyone who puts his or her trust in Him. Thus, even in the midst of a dark and terrible world, one can still find joy.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel is about Christ. The Gospel is about justification in and through Christ. Without faith in Him, one cannot stand in the presence of God. To get a feel for the context of **Galatians 3:16,** wherein he writes: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"[a] meaning one person, who is Christ," one needs to review the immediate context in order to fully grasp the picture of what the Gospel of God is all about:

> 10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."[c] 11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."[d] 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."[e] 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."[f] 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**3:10-14**).

As mentioned earlier, the word *faith* appears nineteen times in this short Epistle. Faith is employed in two differences senses in this Book. It is used in the sense of objective faith as well as subjective faith. In objective faith, faith has for its object, Jesus. In **1:23**, Paul speaks of "the faith" he once tried to destroy. Christ is the object of this faith. On the other hand, subjective faith of the individual is the means of receiving God's grace. Faith (subjective) is the channel or the means whereby God imputes to both men and women His righteousness. This is why Paul writes: "justified by faith in Christ" (**2:16**). Then again in **2:20**, he writes: "I live by faith in the Son of God." When he writes about Abraham and the justification of Gentiles, he calls attention to the means of justification: "God would justify the Gentiles by faith" (**3:8**). Once more, he draws attention to faith: "The righteous will live by faith" (**3:11**). Why was the Law given? Listen to Paul as he pens the following words: "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (**3:24**). Then in **3:26**, he issues his clarion call, as it were, "You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus in Christ Jesus."

Since Jesus is the decisive and final revelation of God, there is salvation in no one else (**Acts 4:12**). In justification, Christ takes our place and we take His. Justification cannot be separated from the Mediator (**1 Timothy 2:5**), which is Christ in you the hope of glory (**Colossians 1:27**). Jesus came to visit us in the Incarnation. It is in Jesus that God reveals His eternal world. In other words, it is in the Christ event that reconciliation with God takes place. The life of Christ, His death, and His resurrection signify the incomprehensible and unique event of the atonement and redemption of the world. This new relationship that men and women experience today is a relationship created by the blood of Christ shed upon the Cross. As a result of Christ's blood, one enters into a new relationship with God. God links everyone to Himself in peace and reconciliation through belief in the One who atones for the sins of humanity. Redemption took place in Him and through Him alone. The Gospel of God is about how God comes to humanity in Jesus. Jesus cleared the way for

reconciliation with God the Father. The Gospel demonstrates that men and women do not find a way to God, but rather, God comes to both in and through Jesus.

As one rereads the **Book of Galatians**, one realizes that God has revealed Himself in Christ. The starting point of the Gospel is the belief that God has revealed Himself in and through Jesus the eternal Logos. It is in the Cross of Jesus that one observes an objective transaction in the salvation of humanity. In other words, God actually does something, which is absolutely necessary for the salvation of men and women. It is only in Jesus that God can deal with His wrath and His holiness at the same time. This is what the Gospel of God is all about—Salvation by faith in Jesus. God prepared reconciliation for humanity even before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. In the Cross of Jesus, one discovers that everything necessary for forgiveness has been done. The Good News is that in the Cross, God has done what must be done to reconcile sinful humanity to Himself. In Jesus, the love of God becomes a gift to fallen humanity. The following words of Robert Clyde Johnson capture the Gospel of God in graphic language:

> This is the intent of the teaching of Jesus, to announce "the gospel of God." His basic concern was to bring men into a new relationship to God, not to teach them new ways of thinking about God. Thus his message was "news," and not a symposium of new ideas about God. He *announced* the "good news" that God was acting to redeem and reconcile the world to himself.[6]

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[1] Part two of this essay will analyze the ethical implications of "Until Christ is formed in you." One cannot say that this phrase excludes either of the two interpretations set forth in this study. In order to do service to both concepts, this message is divided into two parts: emphasis upon the Gospel and conformity to the ethical implications of the Gospel. Both interpretations are valid explanations within the Christian community. Neither reading takes away from the thrust of the Galatian Epistle. One insight complements the other.

[2] The word *faith* occurs nineteen times in the Book of Galatians: 1:23; 2:16 (3x), 20; 3:8, 9 (2x), 11, 12, 14, 22, 23 (2 x), 24, 25, 26; 5:5, 6.

[3]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[4] Galatians 1:6, 7 (2x), 8, 9, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14; 3:8; 4:13.

[5] The word *grace* appears eight times in the Book of Galatians: 1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 3:18; 5:4; 6:18.

a Greek *uncircumcised*

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

a Or *Messiah.* ``The Christ" (Greek) and ``the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean ``the Anointed One"; also in verse 26.

a 4,5 Or *sight in love. He*

d Or *nor heavenly rulers*

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

c Deut. 27:26

d Hab. 2:4

e Lev. 18:5

f Deut. 21:23

[6] Robert Clyde Johnson, *The Meaning of Christ* in the *Layman's Theological Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 86.

Until Christ is Formed in You

Thrust Statement: **Christians are to reflect the rays of His light in their lives.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 4:19; 5:16-26**

Understanding the Implications of the Gospel

The second aspect of "Until Christ is formed in you" discusses the ethical implication of what it means to say "Until Christ is formed in you." Having developed the first part of this essay concerning the Gospel, one must ever be conscious that in the sacrifice of Christ that God has rights over one's conduct. In seeking to understand this statement by Paul—"until Christ is formed in you"—one must examine his or her life in reflection upon Paul's statement. Is Christ formed in you? How long have you been a Christian? Is there a difference in your lifestyle today in comparison to your lifestyle before conversion?

Do you still do the same things you did before you became a Christian? Do you still use the same language you did before you became a Christian? Do you still treat individuals with rudeness? Do you still refuse to love the unlovable? Do you still walk according to the flesh? Do you still treat Sundays the way you did before you became a Christian? Do you still exhibit anger, rage, malice, slander, and so on, in the same way you did before you became a Christian? As a Christian, have you clothed yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? As a Christian, do you forgive grievances that you have with others?

Do you forgive others as the Lord forgives you? Is there a difference between the "then" and the "now" in your daily walk with God? If so, how? Is there a difference in your Sunday attendance with God's people? Is there a difference in your study of the Bible? Do you put God first in your life? Or do you put the pleasures of life before your devotion to the things of God? Is your love for alcohol, drugs, sex, fishing, hunting, working on Sundays, and so on, greater than your love for God? How would you describe your spiritual life—burning zeal or lukewarmness? Are you zealous for the things of God?

Does your concept of worship influence your behavior? Is your Christian worship a total adoration to the One who is Eternal? Your worship—all of your life—must exhibit a foundation in the Eternal God—the One who is Maker, Lover, and Keeper of your soul. For Christ to be formed in you, your adoration for God must include a response to the threefold Reality in the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unless one is awestruck, as it were, with the holiness of God, one will not emulate holiness in his or her way of life. What does the word *holiness* convey to your mind? Do you manifest the Spirit of God in your daily walk with the Father? Do you grieve God's Holy Spirit by the way you live? Unless one is captivated with reverence for the self-existent One, one will not imitate Godlike attributes in his or her life.

If one wishes to turn his or her lifestyle around to God's glory, one's worship must be God-centered, Christ-centered, and Holy Spirit-centered. One's daily walk should bring honor and glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One's reflection upon the creative love of God in and through His Son Jesus is a powerful redemptive force to transform one's behavior. One's daily walk with God testifies to the unspeakable love of God in the gift of His Son Jesus. One's worship of God—twenty-fours hours daily—is a witness as to one's belief in the historical fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Even though one is conscious that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, one can say with straightforwardness that unless Christ in born in you, you will be eternally lost. Is Christ born, as it were, in you? Are you clothed with a new garment? Is the birth of Christ, really and truly, in your heart? Even though the Bible may not express this truth in the exact same way that this author has expressed it, nevertheless the germ of this thought still jumps out at everyone. Take note of Paul's words in **Galatians 4:19**: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." The KJV renders the verse this way: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Paul, in his struggles for the Galatians, suffers birth pangs until Christ comes to birth in the inner life of the believers.

It is true that Christians are to seek to understand more clearly the mysteries of salvation, but, at the same time, Christians are to allow Christ to be formed in them through their earthly life. In the Galatian letter, one discovers that Paul desires that the inner life of every believer be a life lived in such a way that Christ comes to birth in them. When one lives in sin, one's life is not only empty of God, but also his or her life is separated from God. How can one really and truly know that she or he is a child of God? Listen to John as he zeros in on the very crux of the matter: "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (**1 John 3:10**). Toward the end of Paul's epistle to the Galatians, he develops the means whereby the Lord comes to birth in the life of every believer.

Jesus Christ has been given for the salvation of humanity in order that a transformation may come into the lives of those who have allowed the Gospel of God to be formed in them. When the Good News of God's Way of salvation—Jesus Christ—is formed in the lives of men and women, this development of Christ will also result in this second aspect of "until Christ in formed in you" (**Galatians 4:19**), that is, this new life in Christ will manifest itself outwardly in characteristics, or behavior, that will glorify God the Father. This new life in Christ in not intended to be merely

inward, but rather to manifest itself outwardly in fruits that speak of true repentance. Whenever one experiences the new birth from above, this unique event of Christ becomes the property of one's own life. Has the Christ event become the property of your own daily walk with God?

If Christ is not born in you, you will be forever vanished from the presence of God. Does the Spirit lead you or does the flesh lead you? It is in and through Jesus that a transformation comes about. If one professes belief in Jesus without any thing new coming to birth in his or her life, this sort of belief, or profession, the Bible does not recognize as true faith. It is in this same vein that John writes:

> 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
> And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has
> material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him,
> how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with
> words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 19 This then is how we know
> that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his
> presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our
> hearts, and he knows everything (**1 John 3:16-20**).

What is John saying in these verses? How do you feel about others who are less fortunate than yourselves concerning the necessities of life? One's personal life of worship, or devotion, to God involves, on the human side, an utter self-abandonment of oneself to God. When one dwells in God's love, one must become an effective channel of His love, even loving the unlovable. The living core of an individual's worship is a dedication to the will of God in one's life twenty-four hours a day. One's religious zeal to God contributes to that total transfiguration of one's life so that Christ is formed in each one to such an extent that he or she works toward redemption of the world. In one's new birth from above, one observes that this new life is not just something inward, but rather it is something outward that expresses itself through actions, or fruits of the Spirit, that brings honor and glory to God. One's actions of commitment to God will turn one's life in its wholeness toward God.

THE SPIRIT AT WAR WITH THE FLESH

As one reflects upon the Spirit, one cannot but help reflect upon the new birth from above (**John 3:5**). It is through the Gospel of Jesus and the faith of the individual and the operation of the Holy Spirit that both men and women become new persons in Christ. As stated above, this new life in Christ is not to be merely inward, but to display itself outwardly through appropriate fruits. Jesus Christ has been given for the sins of humanity, but, at the same time, He has also been given in order to bring about a transformation in the lives of men and women (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). For one to merely believe in Him without anything new coming to birth in the believer is a faith that God's Word does not recognize. It is in this frame of mind that Paul writes: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)!

When John the Baptist came on the scene announcing the kingdom of God, Matthew captures very vividly the message of John, a message which calls for

repentance: “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea [2] and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (**Matthew 3:1-2**). Repentance demands a change in one’s behavior, a behavior that results in a lifestyle that is worthy of repentance. Pay attention to John, once more, as he calls attention to the necessity of a change in one’s outward behavior: “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (**3:7-8**). Following the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist, Matthew describes the preaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God, which preaching demands a change in behavior: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (**4:17**).

As one examines his or her own life, one should ask the question: Have I surrendered my life to the One whom I deserted? God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather He desires conversion of the sinner. Have you repented? Have you turned your life toward the Lord? Repentance is not just a change in one’s disposition, but it is a surrender of oneself to God. In and through Jesus, God draws everyone who responds in faith into the death of His Son. To die with Jesus is God’s grace; it is not your work, but the work of God. This death is a gift from God; it becomes real in the voluntary act of each individual in obedience and trust to Jesus as Lord.

When one is gripped by God’s love and His holiness, one responds to this grace through faith and baptism. Repentance means that one accepts the death of Jesus as a divine judgment, a judgment that should have fallen upon him or her. Yet, this sentence of death is consummated in Him in order to exempt the one who puts his or her faith and trust in Jesus for his or her salvation. Have you allowed Christ to be formed in you? When one fails to repent, this rejection brings upon oneself God’s wrath. In the **Book of Romans**, Paul develops the concept of repentance in its radical form—the death of Christ corresponds to the death of both men and women:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [2] By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? [3] Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. [5] If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. [6] For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— [7] because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. [8] Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. [10] The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. [11] In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. [13] Do

not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. [14] For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:1-14**).

Repentance is, in essence, the death of the person who has deserted God. Through death, one is reborn—born from above. In this new birth, one depends, not upon Law, but upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and strength to walk in this new life. Just a perusal of the **Book of Galatians** reveals that some wanted to base justification upon law keeping. Yet, this book reveals that justification can only be through faith in the finished work of Christ: "know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (**Galatians 3:16**). Paul, having gone to the very core of the Gospel—justification by faith—he then writes about this new life in Christ:

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. [20] I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [21] I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing"[a] (**3:18-21**)!

Overcoming the works of the flesh cannot be through the Law but through the Spirit. The Spirit of God plays an essential part in the salvation of both men and women. In this same epistle, Paul writes about how the Galatians received God's Spirit:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. [2] I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? [3] Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? [4] Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? [5] Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard (**3:1-5**)?

How does one overcome the works of the flesh? Is it through the Law or through the Spirit? How can Christ be formed in one? As Paul concludes His brief epistle, he calls attention to the necessity of the Spirit in one's daily walk with God, a walk that produces fruit worthy of repentance. The demands of the moral life can only be accomplished, not through the Law, but through the Spirit and God's presence and activity in one's life. The flesh is no match for the Holy Spirit. Just a casual reading of this book reveals that the Spirit and the flesh war against each other (**5:16-18**); the works of the flesh get in the way to the kingdom of God (**5:19-21**); the Spirit produces fruit that fulfils the Law (**5:22-24**); and since it is the Spirit that gives life, then the Spirit should guide the daily conduct of the believer (**5:25-26**).[1]

The Spirit versus the Flesh

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. [17] For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law (**5:16-18**).

The Spirit and the flesh are at war with one another. One observes two spheres of power in opposition to one another. One must not discount the Spirit in one's walk with God. The Spirit of God has been sent with the Son to bring about a new relationship with God, a relationship in which individuals are no longer slaves but sons and daughters of God. Keep your minds on the following words of Paul as he seeks to convey the role of the Spirit in the believer's life:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. [6] Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*,[a] Father." [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (**4:4-7**).

The Holy Spirit, so it seems, is not emphasized in the scheme of redemption among many Christians. In this short epistle, the apostle mentions the Holy Spirit seventeen times. The Greek word *spirit* occurs eighteen times in this epistle. All but one occurrence refers to the divine Holy Spirit (**Galatians 6:18**).[2] Throughout the New Testament writings, one observes the Holy Spirit's activities in the inbreaking of the new age. Jesus, while preaching in the towns of Galilee, encountered some religious leaders—Pharisees—who sought to discredit Jesus' miracles by attributing His work to Beelzebub (**Matthew 12:22-24**). After healing the man who was blind and mute, Jesus calls attention to Spirit's role in this inbreaking of God's kingdom into this new age: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (**12:28**).

Luke, too, recalls for his readers the role of the Holy Spirit in the birth of the Savior of the world: "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[a] the Son of God'" (**Luke 1:35**). John, the apostle, mentions the Holy Spirit's activity in the rebirth (**John 3:3-5**, "born of water and the Spirit" = water which is Spirit)[3] and worship in the Messianic age (**4:21-24**, "in Spirit and truth" = Spirit of truth).[4] After the resurrection of Jesus, shortly before His final departure from His disciples, He informed them:

[7] He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (**Acts 1:8**).

The disciples waited in Jerusalem for this manifestation of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, Luke records this outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the one hundred and twenty (**1:15**):

> This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] "'In the last days, God says,
> I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will
> prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream
> dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my
> Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the
> heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of
> smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before
> the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who
> calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'[a] (**2:16-21**).

The author of Hebrews, possibly Paul, writes about the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who responded to the Good News of God about salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus:

> It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted
> the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] who have tasted the
> goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, [6] if they fall
> away, to be brought back to repentance, because[b] to their loss they are
> crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public
> disgrace (**Hebrews 4:4-6**).

Christians, in their rebirth, have experienced, or tasted, the Holy Spirit in their lives. In the Galatian letter, Paul sets forth the battles that wages between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh (σαρψξ sarx) is an antagonistic power that wars against the Spirit. The word *Spirit* in Galatians designates God's presence and the inbreaking of the new aeon (Messianic age). The Holy Spirit functions as a cosmic force, as it were, in its fierce combat with the flesh—the old world that is passing away. In the closing remarks of Paul, he assures the Galatians that their life can, and should be, guided by the same Spirit that brought them to faith (**3:3**; **5:16-18**). As one battles the flesh, one discovers that God's Spirit—God's presence and activity in both men and women—is the only weapon against the flesh. As noted above, the Holy Spirit is mentioned seventeen times in the **Book of Galatians**.

If one wishes to overcome the works of one's lower nature—the flesh—one must appropriate the Spirit as a reality and conduct one's life by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit that one receives in the rebirth must be allowed to guide and direct one's way of life twenty-four hours a day. If one wishes to overcome illegal drugs, one must allow the Spirit to guide his or her daily walk. If one desires to defeat alcoholism, one must permit the Spirit to direct his or her day-after-day walk. If one wants to conquer anger and rage, one must consent to the Spirit's escort in his or her pace day after day. If one wishes to season his or her language with salt, one must say yes to the Spirit's steering his or her stroll. The Spirit has been sent by God in conjunction with His Son to create a new relationship between Himself and humanity. Listen to Paul as he sets forth this critical understanding as he seeks to bring the Galatians under control:

> But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. [6] Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*,[a] Father." [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (**4:4-7**).

If Christians are conscious of the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh (**5:16-18**), they can allow the Spirit's instructions to guide them in the way that will bring honor and glory to God. One's behavior must not be inconsistent with one's profession. In **5:16**, Paul uses the Greek imperative περιπατειτε peripateite ("walk") to reinforce his emphasis that everyone should conduct his or her daily life by the Spirit. Are you conducting your daily walk by the Spirit? Paul pleaded with the Ephesians:

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (**Ephesians 4:30-32**).

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature," writes Paul (**Galatians 5:16**). The NIV translates the Greek verb περιπατεψω peripatew as "live," but the KJV translates this verb as "walk." Have you appropriated the ways of the Holy Spirit in your daily life? Do you allow the Spirit to guide and direct your daily actions? If not, Christ is not formed in you! Are you conscious that the works of the flesh bar the way to heaven? In **5:19-21**, Paul lists fifteen specific items that the flesh produces. As you read the following list, one is reminded that no belief is genuine unless there is commitment, loyalty, and devotion to the Spirit's guidance. For Paul, the distinctive mark of one's faith in Jesus is his or her behavior. Listen to Paul as he enumerates behavior that bars the way to the kingdom of God:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**5:19-21**).

CONCLUSION

When one allows the works of the flesh to take hold of his or her life, this choice permits neither Jesus nor the Spirit to break in upon him or her. The kingdom of God challenges one's lovelessness, one's hardness, one's drunkenness, one's fits of rage, one's selfish ambition, and so on. In the **Book of Galatians**, one discovers the activities of God, Jesus, and the Spirit breaking into human life. Are you allowing Jesus to be formed in you? Are you allowing God to break into your life? Are you allowing the Spirit to conduct your life? The new life in Christ is not intended to be

merely inward, but it is to be manifested in outward behavior that brings honor and glory to God (**Matthew 5:13-16**). It is in this same disposition that Paul exhorts the Christians in Ephesus to holy living:

> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. [18] They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. [19] Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. [20] You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. [21] Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. [22] You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24] and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (**Ephesians 4:17-24**).

The epistles of Paul stress the necessity of living lives worthy of the Gospel of God. The life of faith takes cruciform shape. In other words, one puts to death the ways of the world. God wants one's life to be an expression of the prayer—"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:10**). When God calls men and women to be His partners in redemption, He expects their cooperation in the whole range of human activity. God wants Christ to *be formed* in all His children (**Galatians 4:19**). Christians are called out of the world only to be sent back into the world to bring about transformation in the lives of men and women. One cannot bring about renovation in other's life unless one's own life is guided "by the Spirit" (**5:16**). Do you live by the Spirit? Or do you live by the flesh? Has Christ come *to birth* in your life? As long as one fails to put off the works of the flesh, Christ cannot be formed in that one.

Where is your allegiance? Do you "live by the Spirit" (**5:25**)? Do you "keep in step with the Spirit" (**5:25**)? If so, you will not be self-seeking, self-willed, or worldly. Listen to Paul as he enumerates the "fruit" of the Spirit:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:22-26**).

Have you "crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (**5:24**)? Is your soul blocked from spiritual things through the works of the flesh? If you do not allow Christ to be formed in you, then you are legislating yourself, as it were, to the throne of God. Do you seek to be self-ruling? Have you opened your heart to the message of God? Are you giving access to the Spirit of Christ who reduces your will to the will of God so that Christ may be formed in you? Are you a child of light? Do you

pay homage to God in your daily walk? Or do you honor yourself in your day after day activities? If one wishes Christ to be born in his or her life, one should think about the words of Paul to the Philippians:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (**Philippians 2:1-8**)!

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a Or *be rendered powerless*

a Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 14.

[1] I am indebted to Charles B. Cousar, *Reading Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians*, A Literary and Theological Commentary (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001), 101-104, for this informative insight as to the interpretation of 5:16-26. For information about this series, go to www.helwys.com or call1-800-747-3016.

a Aramaic for *Father*

[2] **Galatians 3:2, 3, 5, 14; 4:6** (twice), **29; 5:5, 16, 17** (twice), **18, 22, 25** (twice), **6:8** (twice), **6:18**. Out of fourteen verses in the Book of Galatians, the Greek word *spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit seventeen times.

a Or *So the child to be born will be called holy,*

[3] See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 99.

[4] Ibid., 115. Charles H. Talbert offers the following comments about "in Spirit and truth":

(b) If the focus in the context is on where (neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem), there is also implicit a how (in a Temple cultus?). The true worship is "in Spirit and truth." The expression is a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which a complex idea is expressed by two words connected by a conjunction, as in "to pour from cups and gold," instead of "from golden cups"). If so, "Spirit and truth" would be paraphrased either "Spirit of truth" (cf. 14:16-17: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you…the Spirit of truth"; 15:26: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth"), or "Spirit which is truth" (cf. 3:5: water which is Spirit; 1 QS 4:20-21: "Then God will purify the deeds of man by his *truth* and he will cleanse the frame of man. He will eradicate the perverse spirit from within his flesh, and cleanse him by the *Holy Spirit* from all his wicked deeds"). The reference either way is to the Holy Spirit that is given by Jesus after his glorification. How is true worship offered to the Father? Jesus' answer is "in the spirit of truth" / "the Spirit which is truth."

a Joel 2:28-32

b Or *repentance while*

a Aramaic for *Father*

a Or *in the form of*

b Or *the form*

God's Love Letter to the World: An Introduction to the Gospel of John

Thrust Statement: **The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the personification of God's love.**

Scripture Reading: **John 1:1-14**

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JOHN'S GOSPEL

This study begins with some observations about the Gospel of John. Even though this essay is an introduction to the Gospel, nevertheless, it is not the traditional introduction. The primary objective of this study is simply to acquaint one with the thrust of John's Gospel in order to bring about an acquaintance of John's unique approach to the life of Christ on earth. This study also employs a number of charts to facilitate a quick grasp of the matchless format that John sets forth for his readers. A reading of the Gospel of John quickly reveals that this Gospel differs in tone from Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Just a perusal of Matthew's Gospel reveals that his literary work was written to the Jews; Mark' s Gospel for the Romans; Luke's Gospel for the Greeks; and John's Gospel for the Church. The Gospel of John is a priceless document—written that individuals might believe in the name of God's One and only Son (**John 20:31**). A cursory reading of Luke indicates that Luke writes to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, but, on the other hand, John writes to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew's focus in writing his Gospel appears to be to emphasize His kingship. On the other hand, Mark draws attention to His servanthood. Again, Luke places accent on His manhood, but John places importance on His Godhead.

SCHEMA OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

Matthew	Jews	Kingship

Mark	**Romans**	**Servanthood**
Luke	**Greeks**	**Son of Man—Manhood**
John	**Jews & Gentiles** **Church**	**Son of God—Godhead**

As stated above, John's Gospel was written for the church. By the expression "church," this essay includes both Jews and Gentiles. In this Gospel, John frequently interprets certain words for his readers, which gives the impression that John also had a Gentile readership in addition to a Jewish readership. For example, the following Scriptures set forth this assumption of a Gentile audience:

SCHEMA OF WORD INTERPRETATIONS

JOHN 1:37-38	**JOHN 1:41-42**
37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" [1]	The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

JOHN 5:2	**JOHN 9:7**
Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.	"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.
JOHN 19:13, 17	**JOHN 20:16**
When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).	Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Then again, John also calls attention to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as well as the fulfillment of the *types* in the Old Testament. For instance, John writes that Jesus is the "Lamb of God" (**John 1:29**), the Temple of God (**2:19-21**), the Serpent lifted up (**3:14-15**), and the Bread of God that came down from heaven (**6:35**). The following chart is given in order to facilitate the ease of comprehending the context of these citations:

SCHEMA OF THE FULFILLMENT OF

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

JOHN 1:29	JOHN 2:19-21
The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!	19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.
JOHN 3:14-15	**JOHN 6:32-35**
Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.	Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

It is attention-grabbing that John is the only one who records the sermon on The Bread of Life. The Gospel of John is filled with some of the best-known and best-loved Scriptures in all of God's written revelation. To make obvious this statement, one is invited to carefully reflect upon the following Scriptures set forth in tables to display the strength of this declaration:

SCHEMA OF THE BEST-KNOWN AND

BEST-KNOWN SCRIPTURES

JOHN 3:16-17	JOHN 6:35
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.	Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.
JOHN 10:11	**JOHN 11:25-26**
I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.	Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and

	whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
JOHN 14:1-4, 6	**JOHN 15:1**
. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. [4] You know the way to the place where I am going." Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."	"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

UNIQUENESS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

It is obvious that the Gospel of John is just one of four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all report of the life of Christ on earth. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as synoptic Gospels because these three authors employ similar viewpoints and identical language. In contrast, John omits many things that the other authors include in their accounts. Such as the birth of Christ, His baptism, the healing of people possessed by demons, the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane, the ascension, and parables. What's more, unlike the Gospels, the speeches of Jesus, as reported by John, are rather long. One exception to this statement about length is the Sermon on the Mount as detailed by Matthew.

John is the one who speaks of turning water into wine at Cana (**John 2:1-11**). The beloved apostle alone reports the night meeting of Jesus with Nicodemus (**3:1-2**). It is in this Gospel that one discovers one of the most popular stories related in Scripture—the woman of Samaria (**4:1-26**). John is the solitary one of the Gospel writers who leaves a record of the raising of Lazarus (**11:1-44**). Also, John is the one who makes known the story about Jesus washing the disciples feet (**13:1-17**). It is John, and no one else, who unfolds Thomas' conversations (**11:16; 14:4; 20:24-29**). Furthermore, one discerns in this Gospel the personality of Andrew (**1:40-41**; **6:8-9**; **12:22**). Little details about the travels of Jesus with His apostles abound in this Gospel. The details are so intimate that one can only surmise that John was there.

SCHEMA OF UNIQUE EVENTS IN

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Water into Wine	**John 2:1-11**
Nicodemus	**John 3:1-2**
Woman of Samaria	**John 4:1-26**
Resurrection of Lazarus	**John 11:1-44**
Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet	**John 13:1-17**
The Apostle Thomas Expresses Doubt **And Other Conversations**	**John 20:24-29** **John 11:16; 14:5**
Andrew—the Brother of Peter	**John 1:40-41; 6:8-9; 12:22**

JOHN'S PURPOSE IN WRITING

As one embarks upon the Gospel of John, one observes John as he swirls away his readers into the eternal ages to meet head-on the One who was and is from everlasting to everlasting, the One who is eternal, the One who is immortal, the One who is invisible, the One who is the only wise God, and the One who is the Lord and Savior of all who put their trust in Him. John, as he concludes his Gospel, reveals the purpose of his writing this account of the life of Jesus. He writes:

> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**John 20:31**).

SIGNS

Three words stand out in this verse—signs, believe, and life. John selects seven specific miracles to set forth evidence that Jesus is God. These seven miracles illustrate different areas of His power and bear witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. These miracles confirm what John says in the beginning of His Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (**John 1:1**). It is in this same regard that Jesus informs two of John's disciples as to the validity of miracles that attest to His deity. Matthew tells his readers that when John was in prison that two of his disciples told him about all the things that Jesus was doing. Whereupon John sent these two individuals to inquire of Jesus as to whether or not He was the One to come. Matthew's account reads as follows:

> After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. [2] When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples [3] to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" [4] Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: [5] The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the

dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. [6] Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (**Matthew 11:1-6**).

The seven miracles that John records only touch the hem of the garment. But John selects seven of the many miracles to illustrate that Jesus is Lord over nature. Jesus performed miracles that were beyond the ability of man to execute. Jesus proves Himself to be powerful where man is powerless. One cannot read these miracles without exclaiming as Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, did concerning Jesus and the miraculous:

> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. [2] He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (**John 3:1-2**).

The following chart organizes, for easy reference, the seven specialized miracles in the Gospel of John:

SCHEMA OF SEVEN MIRACLES

The Changing of Water into Wine	**John 2:1-11**
The Healing of the Nobleman's Son	**John 4:46-54**
The Healing of the Impotent Man	**John 5:1-9**
The Feeding of the Five Thousand	**John 6:1-14**
The Walking on the Water	**John 6:16-21**
The Healing of the Blind Man	**John 9:1-12**
The Raising of Lazarus	**John 11:1-46**

BELIEVE

John informs his readers that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to attend the Passover (**John 2:13**). It was on this occasion that Jesus drove out the sellers of sheep and doves as well as the exchangers of money from the Temple (**2:14-16**). Immediately, the Jews demanded signs of Him to prove that He had the authority to take such drastic actions against those who had turned the Father's house into a market (**2:18**). Following this episode with the Jews, John alerts his readers: "while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. [24] But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men" (**2:23-24**).

Nicodemus, too, a ruler of the Sanhedrin, believed on Jesus as "a teacher who has come from God" because of the miracles (**3:1-2**). Following the feeding of five thousand, John says, "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (**6:14**). On one occasion, the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus asked: "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me" (**10:32**)? How did they respond? Listen to their response: "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (**10:33**). The miracles should have convinced them of Christ's deity, but they did

not. Jesus rebukes them for their refusal to accept Him, especially in the face of the miraculous:

> Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? [35] If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—[36] what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? [37] Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. [38] But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (**10:34-38**).

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world? Are you willing to put your trust in Him? Following the miracle of changing water to wine (**2:1-11**), Jesus cleanses the Temple (**2:12-16**) and responds to the Jews lack of belief in requesting a miraculous sign to demonstrate that He had the authority to cleanse the Temple (**2:18**). Jesus informs them that if they destroy this temple that He would raise it again in three days (**2:20**). But they failed to understand that He was talking about His resurrection. It is significant that John the apostle reminds his readers that after the resurrection that "they recalled what he had said" and "believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (**2:20-22**). In other words, they committed themselves to Him.

This word *belief* stands for complete faithfulness of the individual to Christ. John characterizes belief as the positive reaction to Jesus as God. Faith is dedication; faith is allegiance; faith is trust. Listen to John as he elaborates on the meaning of belief:

> Yet to all who received him, <u>to those who believed in</u> (εἰς) <u>his name</u> (τοὶ' πιστευψουσιν εἰξ τοΨ ο[νομα αυςτου', toijs pisteuousin <u>eis</u> to onoma autou) he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**1:12-13**).

When one believes *into* his name, then one places his entire confidence, his complete trust, or his total hope *into* that person. The very act of placing faith into Christ must denote surrender to Him; otherwise, one cannot be spoken of as having put one's total trust in Him. One cannot accept Jesus by faith and not have the idea of commitment to Him. Are you committed to Him?

It is not uncommon for believers to accept the notion that faith in Christ is little more than accepting the facts of His deity and atonement apart from any idea of obeying Him. One is justified by faith, but the faith that justifies is not alone. True faith will express itself by its living nature. It is in this vein that James writes:

> [14] What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? <u>Can such faith save him</u>? [15] Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. [16] If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what

good is it? [17] In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. [18] But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. [19] You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. [20] You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? [21] Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? [22] You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. [23] And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. [24] You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. [25] In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? [26] As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead (**James 2:14-26**).

Good works are evidence of one's justification. Too many today profess faith in Christ, but they live as if He does not exist. Paul expresses this same thought to Titus: They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (**Titus 2:16**). Empty faith is not saving faith. Through the power of God, every believer is resurrected and made alive. Listen to Paul as he reminds the Romans:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [2] By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? [3] Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (**Romans 6:1-4**).

When God through Christ rescues individuals from the dominion of sin and death, He sets that person in the new context of righteousness and life that creates a totally new creation of one's whole life. Paul states this truth to the Corinthians: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)! In Christ, everything receives a new meaning. The consequences of that new meaning reach into every chapter of one's existence. Trust in Jesus requires obedience. The Gospel message is not faith plus works, but rather a faith that works in and through repentance. Again, Paul encourages the Romans to remember who they are and how they are to live:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. [13] Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. [14] For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:11-14**).

In order for you to enjoy the victory, you must cooperate with God and you must determine that sin will not be sovereign over you. Whatever you do in life must be characteristic of your holy calling. Paul, again, addresses this outlook to the Corinthians:

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. [25] Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. [26] Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**).

An athlete will bring his body into subjection in order to keep fit for the fight or the race or sport activities he/she is engaged in. Can the believer do less in order to gain victory over sin? Are you "running aimlessly"? Do you "fight like a man beating the air"? Do you allow sin to control your life? Does sin reign in your body? Once more, Paul says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (**Romans 6:12**). It appears that Paul is seeking to drive this point home about not letting sin control one's life: "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (**6:13**). This brings us to the third important element in **John 20:31**—"life."

LIFE

As one contemplates this new life, one must be conscious that the new life is God's gift to every believer. The life that John speaks of is the life that is only available in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**). Do you have eternal life? Do you want to live forever? If so, then you must believe into (εἰς) Jesus. The words of Peter to Cornelius and his household should ring loud and clear to every believer. Listen to Peter as he explains salvation: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in (εἰς) him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**Acts 10:43**). Once more, the words of Paul to the Romans is also quite revealing concerning faith:

New International Version	**The New King James Version**
But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that	[8]But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): [9]that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [10]For with the heart one believes unto (eij")

you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (**Romans 10:8-11**)	righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto (eij") salvation. [11]For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame” (**Romans 10:8-11**).[2]

In the above citation, one observes that belief and confession are both associated with the Greek word eij". Since Jesus is life, one can have eternal life only in Jesus. John begins his Gospel with the following words:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men (**John 1:1-4**).

To whom will the Son of God give life? John records the following words of Jesus as He gives explanation about the Father, the Son, and the “life”: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (**5:21**). The question is: To whom is the Son pleased to give life? Again Jesus gives the answer: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (**5:24**). Those who “hear” and “believe” are the ones to whom Jesus gives life. These three words—signs, believe, and life—provide a logical organization for the Gospel of John. As one peruses the Gospel of John, one is immediately confronted with a structure that centers on “belief”—from beginning to end.

> [30] Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**John 20:30-31**).

CONCLUSION

One’s observation of the Gospel of John is that it is more of a spiritual gospel than it is of an historical gospel. John wants his readers to understand that Jesus is the One person who possesses reality instead of shadows. Jesus is the One who can lead men into the real world of which Plato and others only dreamed. John carefully selects seven miracles out of hundreds that he could have called forth to give validity to the assertion that Jesus is God.

John describes the feeding of the five thousand (**John 6:1-14**) as a launching pad to call attention to Jesus’ discourse on the bread of life (**6:25-59**). Again, the miracle of healing a blind man (**9:1-12**) is used by John to call attention to a statement that Jesus makes: “I am the light of the world” (**9:5**). Even the raising of Lazarus from the dead (**11:1-46**) sets the tone for Jesus’ famous statement: “I am the resurrection and the life” (**11:25**). As one studies the miracles Jesus performs, one soon discovers that the miracles were windows into the reality of God. Jesus did not just feed five

thousand, for He is the "real" bread that came down from heaven. He did not simply open the eyes of a blind man, for Jesus Himself is the "true" light of the world. For John, the miracles of Christ are not just acts, but rather windows into the reality of who Jesus is. The miracles were not just events in time, but rather they were windows into eternity. The miracles give credence to the words of Jesus, and, at the same time, stress the spiritual meaning of the miraculous.[3]

What does **John 20:30-31** mean to you? How do you interpret the miracles? What do the words signs, belief, and life conjure up in your own mind? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Are you willing to put your trust in Him? Remember that the word *belief* is more than just mental assent. Belief stands for dedication, allegiance, and trust. Are you conscious that you are a "new creation" in Christ Jesus? Are you still offering the parts of your body to sin? Or are you yielding your bodies to God? Do you want eternal life? If so, then you should remember the words of Jesus: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

[3] I am deeply indebted for this insight on miracles to William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 10.

Jesus Is God

Thrust Statement: Jesus is eternally God.

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-2

John begins his Gospel with the identity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He informs his readers that Jesus is God. For John, Jesus is not merely a concept of Deity, but He is the only and full concept of Deity. From the beginning to the end of John's Gospel, he asserts that Jesus is God. One of the greatest questions that everyone must face is: Who is He? The next question that everyone must come to grips with is: What do you think of Jesus Christ? This is one of the most important inquiries that anyone will ever face. Is He God or is He not? What is your answer? One's eternal destiny depends upon one's reply. If Jesus is only a man, then you may forget Him. On the other hand, if He is God as He claims, then one must surrender his/her life to Him and serve Him faithfully.

The Gospel of John is different, in one respect, from the other Gospels. For instance, Matthew portrays Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. But Mark reveals Jesus as God's servant. Then Luke deals with the humanity of Jesus. On the other hand, John focuses more on the Deity of Jesus. Having said this, this does not mean that the other Gospel narrators do not emphasize the Deity of Christ. As one peruses the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—one also discovers the Deity of Christ set forth with a great deal of clarity. Matthew, for instance, discloses the voice that came from heaven, following Christ's baptism, which reveals the unique nature of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**Matthew 3:17**).[1] Shortly before Christ's final trip to Jerusalem, He inquired of His disciples as to what the people were saying about Him: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (**16:3**). Some identified the Son of Man as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (**16:14**). But Jesus was not satisfied with this; He wanted to know what His disciples thought. It was at this point that Peter exclaims: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (**16:16**).

Again Matthew zeroes in on the Deity of Christ following this confession by Peter. For example, six days later, following Jesus' question about His identity, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew reveals another scene of that startling voice from heaven, which describes the unique relationship between the Father and the Son: "While he (Peter) was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (**17:5**). As Matthew closes his account of the earthly ministry of Jesus, he gives the testimony of the centurion and his cohorts that were with him guarding Jesus: "Surely he was the Son of God!" (**27:54**).

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? If you have not answered this question, then the Gospel of John is for you. This Gospel is written with you in mind. It is written for those who do not yet believe that Jesus is God. This book is written to lead men to the conclusion that Jesus is God in order that they may have eternal life. Listen to John as he explains his reason for writing:

> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**John 20:30-31**).

John only confirms what the other Gospel writers reveal. Luke informs Theophilus that this One that is called Jesus is the One that the angels of God heralded to the Bethlehem shepherds (**Luke 2:1-12**). At this revelation to the Shepherds, Luke also informs his readers that

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (**2:13-14**).

Yes, this is the One who walked this earth for thirty-three years. This is the One who was crucified at Calvary; this is the One who rose in triumph from the grave; this is the One who visited His disciples over a period of forty days following His resurrection, and this is the One who was declared the Lord of Glory. The evidence is overwhelming as to whom Jesus of Nazareth is. The evidence from John is so overpowering that one cannot deny, with honesty, that Jesus is God. Even one of His own disciples, Thomas, when confronted with unquestionable confirmation, had to exclaim: "My Lord and my God!" (**John 20:28**).

JOHN'S USE OF THE IMPERFECT TENSE

As one returns to the beginning of John's Gospel, John equates Jesus with God. John begins with the affirmation: "In the beginning was (ἠν, hn) the Word, and the Word was (ἠν, hn) with God, and the Word was (ἠν, hn) God. [2] He was (ἠν, hn) with God in the beginning" (**1:1-2**). For John there was never a time that the "Word" did not exist. By the use of the imperfect tense verb, John expresses a continuous state, not a completed action. In other words, the imperfect tense indicates continuous action in past time. If one compares "I am loosing" (present tense) with "I was loosing" (imperfect tense), the significance is clear. John employs the imperfect tense

four times within these two short verses. John is seeking to set before the reader something that is ongoing, not something present, past, or future. John refers to a mode of existence that transcends time. John Phillips captures the essence of this verb when he writes:

> The verb John uses takes us into the sphere of the timeless. In other words, the one John calls "the Word" belongs to a realm where time does not matter. The word did not have a beginning. The word will never have an ending. The word belongs to eternity.[2]

The human mind cannot fathom such inscrutability. John is saying that one, in contemplation of the Word (λοψγö, logos) must go back to the dateless past, that is to say, to a time before time. John is declaring that when you think of Jesus, then you must go back beyond the beginning. John begins his Gospel with the phrase, "In the beginning" (ςΕν αςρχη', en arch/), which refers to a period before creation. The prepositional phrase does not convey the same meaning as is utilized by Moses in **Genesis 1:1**. The expression, "In the beginning" (tyviareB]), as used by Moses, in **Genesis 1:1** appears to have reference to the beginning of creation, but this same set phrase employed by John speaks, not of the beginning of creation, but rather of a period before the creation of the universe.

Just a casual reading of John's writings reveal that the "the Word" (λοψγö, logos) did not have a beginning. One sees confirmation of Jesus' dateless past as reported by John (**1:1**) in Jesus' prayer to the Father: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**John 17:5**). Again, Jesus communicates this same truth in his conflict with the Jews. Listen to the conversation between the Jews and Jesus as reported by John:

> 52 At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" 54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" 58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (**8:52-59**).

Abraham's date of birth was 2166 BCE. Yet, Jesus says, "before Abraham was born, I am." Paul, too, puts across this truth about Jesus in his letter to the Colossians: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (**Colossians 1:17**). Jesus did not have a beginning nor will He have an ending. He is eternally God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (**John 1:1**). John does not put forward a birth, but rather he describes a never-ending state. In

order to set forth this concept, John employs, as stated above, the imperfect tense to convey the perception of an unbroken state. The English text is not as forceful as the Greek text. For John, the logos did not have a beginning; the logos did not have an ending; and the logos belongs to eternity. The imperfect tense (ἠν, hn) "was" refers to a mode of existence that transcends time. In other words, the imperfect active indicative "expresses continuous timeless existence."[3]

JOHN'S USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

There are those who deny the Deity of Jesus Christ. Since the mystery of the incarnation is such an enigma, many refuse to accept the union of God with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there are individuals who accept the teachings of the New Testament that Jesus is God. Some advance the notion that Jesus is the son of God, but not the unique Son of God. In other words, Jesus is a son of God, perhaps, only in a greater degree than the rest of humanity, but not in kind. In John's Gospel, he affirms that the Word was God and that this Word became flesh (**John 1:1, 14**). John says it this way: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (**3:16**). The Greek text sheds light upon the Deity of Jesus Christ. The following chart gives the Greek text as well as the English text to facilitate the grasping of the Greek grammar rules discussed below concerning the use or non-use of the definite article.

JOHN 1:1-2	**JOHN 1:1-2**
ϛΕν αϛρχή' ἠν οΣ λοψγö, καιΨ οΣ λοψγö ἠν προΨ τοΨν θεοψν, καιΨ θεοΨ ἠν οΣ λοψγö. [2]ου/τö ἠν εϛν αϛρχή' προΨ τοΨν θεοψν.[4]	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning.

The Greek text uses five definite articles, whereas the English text (NIV) uses only three. To assist one in recognizing the definite article in the Greek text, the definite article is underlined for ease of reference in the Greek and English texts. The article in Greek is like an "index finger pointing out individual identity."[5] Unlike English, the Greek does not have an indefinite article. As an interpreter interprets the Greek text, the reader must carefully observe the presence or absence of the article. Whenever the article is used, the emphasis is upon "particular identity, individuality, even uniqueness in some contexts, and upon contrast."[6] Again, Wuest in seeking to call attention to the non-use of the article, he writes: "When the article is not used, the emphasis is upon the quality or character of the person or thing designated by the noun."[7]

Unfortunately, in an interpretation of **John 1:1**, which deals with the Deity of Christ, one must resort to terminology that is not readily understood by the average reader. John's employment of the use of the *articular* noun (the noun preceded by the article) and the *anarthrous* noun (the noun not preceded by the article) play a role in understanding John's emphasis upon his theology that Jesus is God. These distinctive identifications of nouns may seem difficult to appreciate, but the *articular* noun identifies and the *anarthrous* noun qualifies. According to Ray Summers, when a noun points out a particular identity, then this use of the noun is called the *articular* use of

the noun. On the other hand, the noun that indicates quality or character is the "anarthrous" use of the noun.[8]

When one is trained in Greek syntax,[9] the definite article enhances one's ability to interpret the Word of God more clearly in its theology. For instance, the presence of the article οΣ (&o, "the") before λοψγö (logos, "word") points out particular identify (*articular*). Wuest writes on the use of the *articular* noun in **John 1:1** as follows: "The Lord Jesus is not merely *a* concept of Deity. He is Deity told out. He is the only and the full concept of Deity."[10] Again, one should observe the use and non-use of the definite article in John: "In the beginning was the Word, (&o logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word (&o logos) was God (θεοΨ, qeos)" [**1:1**]. In contrast, the word *God* is not *articular*, but *anarthrous*. By John's lack of the definite article before qeos, he is saying that the logos is as to His essence Deity. Thus, John is emphasizing the quality or character of Deity.

Dana and Mantey sum up the matter quite well:

> The use of the articular and anarthrous constructions of θεοψ" is highly instructive. A study of the uses of the term as given in Moulton and Geden's Concordance convinces one that without the article θεοψ" signifies divine essence, while with the article divine personality is chiefly in view.[11]

For John, Jesus is fully divine. John states emphatically: "He was with God in the beginning" (**1:2**). The Hebrews writer, too, express the preexistence of Christ before the creation of the world: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (**Hebrews 1:1-2**).

John also reports Jesus as telling His disciples that He is going away (**John 14:1-4**). Thomas then inquires as to where He is going and to show him the way (**14:5**). Whereupon, Jesus answers: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (**14:6-7**). Jesus' statement, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father," startled Philip into saying, " Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (**14:8**). Jesus' response to Philip is also quite revelatory as to who Jesus is: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (**14:9**). Apart from Jesus, one does not know what God is like. But if Jesus Christ is God, then one can know what God is like because he knows what Jesus is like. If one wants to know what God is like, then one should study Jesus the Messiah. There can be no knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ.

John's second statement in **1:1** is also indicative of Christ's separate personality, which affirms the Trinity. John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The word *with* is from the Greek word προψ (pros), which literally means "facing." This second statement testifies to the separate personality of the Logos. If both "God" and "Word" were

articular (noun preceded by the article), then they would be "coextensive and equally distributed and so interchangeable."[12] Both are God, but the Son is not the Father, neither the Father the Son. As one recalls the beginning of John's Gospel—"The Word was God—one cannot help but recall how John concludes his book—"My Lord and my God." Jesus, after healing a man on the Sabbath day, encounters opposition from the Jews. In response to their complaints, Jesus says, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (**John 5:17**). John understands the implications of this comeback and adds the logical conclusion: "For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (**5:18**).

GRANDVILLE SHARP'S RULE OF GREEK SYNTAX

John states emphatically that Jesus is God. Are there other writers in the New Testament who call Jesus God? To answer this question, this discussion will talk about Grandville Sharp's rule of Greek syntax, which deals with two nouns of the same case joined by the conjunction "and" and the definite article preceding the first noun and not appearing before the second noun of the same case. In 1798, Grandville Sharp discovered the following rule in Greek syntax:

> When the copulative καιΨ (kai) connects two nouns of the same case [viz., nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participle) of personal description respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connection, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill], if the article οΣ (&o), or any of its cases precedes the first of the said nouns or participles and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e., it denotes a farther description of the first named person.[13]

Since this message is designed for the person in the "pew," then it is necessary to define terms that the scholar already knows. In the above paragraph, Sharp speaks of "two nouns of the same case." As one studies nouns in the Greek, one discovers that there are four distinctive things associated with nouns: (1) declension, (2) case, (3) gender, and (4) number. Declension has to do with inflection and no functional significance. Case has to do with the function of the noun as it relates to the verb. There are eight distinctive functional case ideas covered by the various forms. The context has to determine the case—Genitive or Ablative—since the same form is employed for the same case. The following chart illustrates the various functions covered by case endings:

FORM		CASE	BASIC IDEA
Singular	Plural		
ö (os)	οι (oi)	Nominative	Designation
ου (ou)	ων (wn)	Genitive	Description
ου (ou)	ων (wn)	Ablative	Separation
ώ (w)	οϊ (ois)	Dative	Interest
ώ (w)	οϊ (ois)	Locative	Location (or Position)
ώ (w)	οϊ (ois)	Instrumental	Means
ον (on)	οϋ (ous)	Accusative	Limitation

ε (e)	οι (oi)	Vocative	Address

In the above chart, one observes that the Genitive and Ablative case endings are the same; one also notices that the Dative, Locative, and Instrumental are identical. This is the reason that some Greek grammars only list five cases—Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, and Vocative.[14] Before one analyzes the more controvertible texts dealing with the Deity of Jesus, it would be helpful to illustrate the above principles, enunciated by Sharp in 1798, with Scriptures that are not questionable. One such example is by the author of Hebrews, he writes:

HEBREWS 3:1	**HEBREWS 3:1**
{Οθεν, αςδελφοιΨ άγιοι, κλησεως εςπουρανιψου μεψτοχοι, κατανοησατε τοΨν αςποψστολον καιΨ αςρχιερεψα τη' οΣμολογιψά ηΣμω'ν ςΙησου'ν.[15]	Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the **apostle** and **high priest** whom we confess.

The definite article and conjunction are underlined and the two nouns in the accusative case are highlighted in red. The rule is that if you have two nouns in the same case joined by the copulative kai and preceded by one definite article, then the second noun ("high priest") relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun ("apostle"). Thus, the "apostle" and "high priest" refer to the same person, which is Jesus.

Again, the following Scripture in **Romans 15:6** illustrates Sharp's principle:

ROMANS 15:6	**ROMANS 15:6**
ίνα οΣμοθυμαδοΨν εςν εΣνιΨ στοψματι δοξαψζητε τοΨν θεοΨν καιΨ πατεψρα του' κυριψου ηΣμω'ν ςΙησου' Χριστου'.	So that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the **God** and **Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, the nouns "God" and "Father" are both in the accusative case joined by the copulative kai and preceded by one definite article (τοΨν, ton, "the"). Thus, the second noun ("Father") relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun ("God"). Thus, the nouns "God" and "Father" refer to the same person, which is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The foregoing examples are sufficient to set the stage for other Scriptures concerning the Deity of Christ that are not as easily determined from English translations. But before proceeding to the more difficult, perhaps, it would be beneficial to observe Sharp's principle concerning another passage that is not in dispute. For instance, consider the following from the writings of Peter:

2 Peter 2:20	**2 Peter 2:20**
εις γαΨρ αςποφυγοψντε ταΨ μιαψσματα του' κοψσμου εςν εςπιγνωψσει του' κυριψου [ηΣμω'ν] καιΨ σωτη'ρö ςΙησου' Χριστου', τουψτοϊ δεΨ παψλιν εςμπλακεψντε	If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our **Lord** and **Savior** Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are

ηΣττω'νται, γεψγονεν αυςτοῖ ταΨ ε[σχατα χειψρονα τω'ν πρωψτων.[16]	worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.[17]

The definite article (του, tou, "the") and conjunction (και, kai, "and") are underlined and the two nouns in the genitive case are highlighted in red. Again, the rule is that if you have two nouns in the same case joined by the copulative kai and preceded by one definite article, then the second noun ("Savior") relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun ("Lord"). Thus, the nouns "Lord" and "Savior" refer to the same person, which is Jesus. Even though the NIV translators did not include the definite article, still the English translation is clear. There is no dispute here that the author describes the same person by the two nouns with the one article.

One also discovers the same idiom in **1 Peter 1:1**; yet, this text is more controvertible among many scholars. The English translations, as a whole, are not as clear in setting forth the idea that the two nouns "God" and "Savior" refer to Jesus Christ. Again, the following example clarifies the difficulty in the English translations by comparing the Greek text with the Greek rules of syntax:

2 PETER 1:1	**2 PETER 1:1**
ΣυμεωΨν Πεψτρö δου'λö καιΨ αςποψστολö ςΙησου' Χριστου' τοῖ' ισσοψτιμον ηΣμι'ν λαχου'σιν πιψστιν εςν δικαιοσυψνή του' θεου' ηΣμω'ν καιΨ σωτη'ρö ςΙησου' Χριστου'[18]	To those who through the righteousness of our **God** and **Savior** Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

The definite article and conjunction are underlined and the two nouns in the genitive case ("God" and "Savior") are highlighted in red. Once more, the rule is that if you have two nouns in the same case joined by the copulative kai and preceded by one definite article, then the second noun ("Savior") relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun ("God"). Thus, the nouns "God" and "Savior" refer to the same person, which is Jesus Christ. In the comparison between the Greek text and the English text, one discovers that Peter, as John does in his Gospel, calls Jesus God. One more witness will suffice for this study on Jesus is God. The next witness is from Paul in his letter to Titus. In this letter, he, too, calls Jesus God.

TITUS 2:13-14	**TITUS 2:13-14**
προσδεχοψμενοι τηΨν μακαριψαν εςλπιψδα καιΨ εςπιφαψνειαν τῆ' δοψξῆ του' μεγαψλου θεου' καιΨ σωτη'ρö ηΣμω'ν ςΙησου' Χριστου', [14]ὃ ε[δωκεν εΣαυτοΨν υΣπεΨρ ηΣμω'ν, ἱνα λυτρωψσηται ηΣμᾶ' αςποΨ παψσῆ ασνομιψᾶ καιΨ καθαριψσή εΣαυτῶ' λαοΨν περιουψσιον, ζηλωτηΨν καλω'ν ε[ργων.	While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great **God** and **Savior**, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The definite article and conjunction are underlined and the two nouns in the genitive case ("God" and "Savior") are highlighted in red. Once more, the rule is that if

you have two nouns in the same case joined by the copulative kai and preceded by one definite article, then the second noun relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun. Thus, the nouns "God" and "Savior" refer to the same person, which is Jesus Christ. One observes in the writings of John, Peter, and Paul that Jesus is called God. Again, Who is Jesus of Nazareth? The answer is that He is the Son of God, which makes Him equal with God. Since the New Testament was originally written in Greek, then it is incumbent upon the interpreter to rely upon the Greek text in order to determine the meaning intended by the author.

CONCLUSION

As one contemplates the Deity of Jesus Christ, one can visualize God opening a window from heaven so that humanity may see eternity and the unchanging love of God. The love of God is so great that even in eternity He planned to redeem the world through the atonement of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Even in the Garden of Eden, God set forth the idea that there must be atonement for sin. Today, as Christians look back upon that dreadful day of Christ's crucifixion, one can hear the cry: "That was the atonement for sin." Do you believe this? Remember that Jesus is like God and God is like Jesus. The atonement for sin was not an afterthought on the part of God the Father or God the Son. The truth that Jesus Christ is God gives even greater significance to His death upon the cross.

When Jesus died upon the cross, He died for others, not for Himself. He had no sin. Being God He is sinless. He died in order to remove the burden of guilt from the ones who were/are willing to put their trust in Him. God's scheme of redemption is beyond the power of the human mind to fully grasp. It is in this vein that Paul expresses the wonder of it all:

> And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (**Ephesians 3:17b-19**).

These verses draw attention to the four dimensions of God's unmatchable love—how wide, how long, how high, and how deep. The King James Version expresses Paul's thoughts with superb language: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, [18]May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."[19] The four dimensions are: breadth, length, depth, and height. It is God's desire that we understand something about the fullness of His love.

The story is told of some of Napoleon's soldiers who opened a door of a prison that had been used during the Spanish Inquisition. In one of the dungeons, the soldiers found the remains of an individual still chained, but the flesh and clothing were long disappeared. There was only an anklebone left to tell the story. Yet, there was something else that caught the eyes of the soldiers. Above the chain and anklebone, on the wall, the soldiers noticed a crude cross etched into the stones. Then around the cross, they found in Spanish the word "height" above the cross. Below was the word

"depth." Then on one side, the soldiers found the word "breath." And, finally, on the other side, they found the word "length." There is no doubt that this prisoner, in his dying moments, found strength in God who controls the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height." Are you satisfied with God's Way of salvation through faith in His Son Jesus Christ? What do you think of Jesus Christ? Who is He? If Jesus is only a man, then you may forget him. But, if He is the Son of God," then you dismiss Him at your own peril. If He is God, and He is, then you must submit to His demands and surrender total allegiance. You should be able to say with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" [οΣ κυψριö μου καιΨ οΣ θεοψ μου] (**John 20:28**). Have you made this confession? For one to believe is to enter into eternal life. Do you remember the words of John as he began his account of the life of Jesus? If not, then reread the following words:

> [20]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men (**John 1:1-4**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless otherwise stated.

[2] John Phillips, Exploring the Gospels, *John* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 17.

[3] Cleon L. Rogers Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 175.

[4] Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

[5] Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1946), 15. See also Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964), 137, where they write: The function of the article is to point out an object or to draw attention to it. Its use with a word makes the word stand out distinctly."

[6] Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament*, 15.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ray summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 16. See also Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 140.

[9] Syntax deals with the various possible meanings of words arranged together in certain constructions. In other words, syntax is concerned with the relationships among the words used in sentences.

[10] Wuest, *The Practical Us of the Greek New Testament*, 16.

[11] Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 139-140.

[12] A. T. Robinson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1977), 67.

[13] Cited in A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, 62.

[14] For a detailed study of the eight cases and their function, see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, 15-21.

[15] All Greek citation are from the Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983, unless stated otherwise.

[16]Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

[17]*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

[18]Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

[19] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

John's Gospel:

Purpose for Writing

Thrust Statement: **John wrote his Gospel in order to enable people to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and the savior of the world.**

Scripture Reading: **John 20:30-31**

Toward the end of John's Gospel, he reveals the motive behind his writing such an insightful book concerning the One who became flesh and tabernacled among humanity (**John 1:14**). As one reflects upon the structure of this Book, one again is reminded of the words of Peter: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (**2 Peter 1:21**). [1] This Book has spoken to men and women of every age. One cannot read this Book without a consciousness of its "ring of truth" on every page. John's Gospel speaks to the old, it speaks to the young, it speaks to the saint, and it speaks to the sinner. From beginning to end, this Book reveals Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. This Gospel also unfolds, as it were, the mind of God and the mind of Christ. This Book sets forth the love of God and the love of Christ for a sinful world (**John 3:16-21**).

In the reading of this wonderful Book, one discovers that this Gospel points to Christ as the Son of God and to Christ as the savior of sinners. This Book makes known the way to heaven, namely, Jesus (**14:6**). The writings of John give comfort for hurting hearts (**5:1-16**). It gives solace to those in sorrow (**8:1-11**, see also, **Matthew 11:28-30**). It gives guidance to those who wish a way out of the "sting of death" (**11:25-26**, see also, **1 Corinthians 15:54-57**). It gives hope to those in sin (**1:29**). As one reads and rereads the Gospel of John, one cannot help but recall the words of the Psalmist: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (**Psalm 119:105**). It goes almost without saying that no one can be complete without God's Word to His people (**Matthew 4:4**). As we reflect together upon the overall purpose of

John's Gospel, it will be my purpose to assist you, as well as myself, in comprehending more fully the following words of John:

> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**John 20:30-31**).

The Author of the Book

Even though John—one of the chosen Twelve—wrote the book, nevertheless, one is always conscious that the true author is the Holy Spirit. Having said this, the human author was born, as far as we know, in Galilee (**Mark 1:21**). He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (see **Mark 15:40** and **Matthew 27:56**) and the brother of James (**Matthew 10:2**). John, as well as his brother (martyred—**Acts 12:22**), was once called a "son of thunder" (**Mark 3:17**) by Jesus. By trade, John was a fisherman (**Matthew 4:21**). One cannot help but wonder if John, like Andrew, the brother of Peter, had not heard John the Baptist (**John 1:40**). The name of one of the two men who heard Jesus speak is not given. Was it John, the brother of James? Even though John was not always loving and gentle (see **Mark 3:17**), he became known as the apostle of love.

John was one of the "inner circle" (the triumvirate) in the ministry of Jesus—Simon, James, and John. James and John were present at the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (**Mark 1:29**). These three were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (**9:1-12**). They were also selected to be with Him during His time of agony in the garden (**14:33**). John was also one of the disciples who stood by the mother of Jesus at the crucifixion. When Jesus saw John standing next to His mother, He spoke to both (**John 19:25-27**).

Purpose of John's Gospel

The author of the Book of John records the words of John the Baptist in order to set the stage for his development that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but that He is also the Son of God: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (**1:29**). Listen to John as he explains his purpose in writing: "Jesus did <u>many other</u> miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (**20:30-31**). The Gospel of John is relatively short; nevertheless, he accumulates enough evidence to convince anyone who is seeking to understand who this One is who is called Jesus of Nazareth. John records very few of the miracles that Jesus actually performed. In fact, he writes:

> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (**21:24-25**).

Just a perusal of John's Gospel quickly reveals that John's objective in recording events surrounding the life of Christ differed in some important aspects. For

example, Matthew presents Jesus as the King, Mark set forth Jesus as the Servant, Luke portrays Jesus as human, and John represents Jesus as Divine. Needless to say, this neat category, as set forth by commentators, is not strictly accurate. All four Gospels deal with the identity of Jesus Christ as God. There is a sense in which these Gospels appear to shed various shades of light about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. As just stated, Matthew displays Jesus as heir to the throne of David; Mark shows Jesus as going about serving humanity; Luke exhibits Jesus as the perfect man in contrast to sinful humanity; and finally, John pictures His divinity—God. Every Gospel is concerned with the identity of Jesus. Who is He?

John presents Jesus as the One who came down from heaven (**John 3:34**). This One that John declares as the Messiah is also the One who was before the world was spoken into existence (**1:1-3, 14-18**; **17:1-5**). John asserts that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (**1:1**). How could John prove this assertion? John proved it by the testimony of the miraculous. Yes, he confirmed it by the signs (σημει'α shmeia) that were of a miraculous nature (**20:30**). John lists several miracles to give credence to back up his claim concerning Jesus as the Son of God. For example, he records the following miracles in order to substantiate his claims concerning the true identity of Jesus as Son of God: (**1**) turns water into wine [**2:1-11**], (**2**) heals official's son at Capernaum [**4:46-54**], (**3**) heals invalid at the pool of Bethesda [**5:1-9**], (**4**) feeds 5000 with five barley loaves and two fishes [**6:5-13**], (**5**) walks on water [**6:19-21**], (**6**) heals a man born blind [**9:1-41**], (**7**) raises Lazarus from the dead [**11:1-44**], (**8**) resurrects from the dead [**2:18-22; 20:1-9**], (**9**) passes through a locked door [**20:26**], and (**10**) disciples catch fish through the miraculous [**21:1-11**].

The first miracle that John records is the turning of water into wine; the seventh miracle is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. John is saying, in essence, these two miracles, as well as the other eight, prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the Son of God. The crowning of all the miracles is the resurrection. The first miracle is recorded in **2:1-11**, but the second miracle that John records is not described until **4:46-54,** which was the second miracle performed in Galilee (**4:54**). Did Jesus perform other miracles in between these two? Yes! After the first miracle—performed in Galilee—Jesus went to Jerusalem and performed many other miracles (**2:12-24**].

John selected carefully the miracles he wanted to call forth in order to establish his claims concerning Jesus of Nazareth as God come in the flesh. If one can turn water into wine, if one can heal one who is close to death, if one can heal an individual who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, if one can feed 5000 on five small barley loaves and two fishes, if one can walk on water, if one can heal the blind, if one can raise the dead, if one can resurrect from the dead, if one can walk through a locked door, and if one can create a miraculous catch of fish, then this One should be recognized for who He is, namely, God.

As one mulls over these miracles, one again must reflect upon the words of John toward the close of his Gospel as he justifies his limited use of miracles: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (**21:25**). This statement of John coincides with an earlier statement of John concerning faith in Him by Nicodemus as the logical outcome of miracles performed

by Jesus in Jerusalem. Between the first and second miracles that John records that were performed in Galilee, one can listen in on a conversation between a Jewish religious leader and Jesus (**3:1-21**). Nicodemus' statement to Jesus is quite telling concerning the effect of the miraculous as to His claims:

> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. [2] He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (**3:1-2**).

For Nicodemus, it was just a forgone conclusion that no one could do the things He did without God being with Him. Is it any wonder that Nicodemus said, "We know"? Prior to this conversation, John had only recorded one miracle in Galilee, but, according to Nicodemus' statement to Jesus, one observes the language of numerous miracles performed in Jerusalem—"no one could perform the miraculous signs." Nicodemus uses the plural (σημει'α shmeia, "signs"), not the singular (σημει'ον shmeion, "sign"), which indicates that many other miracles had been performed between the first recorded miracle in Galilee (**2:1-11**) and the second recorded miracle in Galilee (**4:46-54**). No one but God could actually turn water into wine and heal a child at the point of death, or even raise the dead. John emphasizes that the miracles between miracle one and the last miracles he records all go to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Even the fifth miracle—walks on water—signifies Jesus' power over nature, which also reveals His deity.

One cannot help but wonder why John chose to record so many miracles in Jesus ministry if miracles were not a means of giving validity to the ministry of Jesus. After the performing of the first miracle—turning water into wine—Jesus went to Jerusalem. Upon His arrival He witnessed individuals making merchandise of God's house. In His anger, He "scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables" (**2:15**). He rebuked them for turning His Father's house into a market (**2:16**). This action on the part of Christ so astonished the Jews that they wanted to know "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" (**2:18**). Whereupon Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (**2:19**). The Jews misunderstood His comments and associated His remarks to the literal temple built by Herod, which took forty-six years to build. After the resurrection, the disciples realized that the miracle related to His resurrection—"The temple he had spoken of was his body" (**2:21**).

While at Jerusalem, He performed many miraculous signs and the people believed (**2:23**). These miracles convinced men like Nicodemus (**3:1-2**). After His visit in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples headed back to Galilee. On the way back, they went through Samaria. Again, one encounters the miraculous. In Jesus discussion with the woman at the well, He revealed to the woman that she had been married five times and was simply living with a man at the present time without marriage (**4:17**). She was so taken back by this kind of knowledge that she went into the village to tell them about this One that she considered to be the Christ. In her excitement, she said to the town people: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (**4:29**). As a result of this testimony concerning this supernatural knowledge that John records: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him

because of the woman's testimony" (**4:39**). What generated this faith? One must say that this supernatural knowledge was looked upon as a miraculous sign.

After the conversion of many in Samaria, Jesus and His disciples went back to Galilee where He had performed His first miracle (**4:46**). Upon His arrival, He was confronted by the request of a royal official to heal his child—a child at the point of death (**1:47**). Jesus makes a telling remark concerning the power that miracles have upon the witnesses of such miraculous signs: "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" (**4:48**). Once more, after the feeding of 5000 with just five small barley loaves and two fishes (**6:8-10**), one again is confronted with the effect of the miraculous upon the mind: "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (**6:14**).

Again, one finds Jesus in Jerusalem attending the Feast of Tabernacles (**7:1-24**). The question arose as to His true identity. John informs his readers: "many in the crowd put their faith in Him" (**7:31**). Did the miraculous play a part in their faith? Listen once more as John reveals their words: "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" (**7:31**). While still in Jerusalem, Jesus heals a man of blindness—born blind from birth (**9:1**). As a result of this miracle, some believed on Him as the Christ. On the one hand, some individuals said Jesus was a sinner, but on the other hand, others denied this allegation by saying, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" (**9:16**). What is astounding is that some refused to believe in spite of the miraculous.

Should miracles convince one of the truthfulness of Jesus' claims? During the Feast of Dedication, the Jews asked Jesus to tell them plainly if he was the Christ (**10:24**). Jesus spoke rather pointedly on this point: "I did tell you, but you do not believe" (**10:25**). Then Jesus says, "The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me" (**10:25**). Did the miraculous play an important part in verifying the truthfulness of Jesus' claim to be the Christ and God's Son? Jesus rebukes the Jews for their lack of faith in Him. He calls attention to His miracles by saying,

> Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? [37] Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. [38] But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father (**10:36-38**).

On another occasion, John exhibits incredulity as he marvels at the unbelief of many Jews who refused to believe even after they witnessed many miracles. Listen to John as he explains: "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (**12:37**). As already pointed out, John, in the conclusion of his Gospel, calls attention to miracles as a means of creating faith:

> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may [a] believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**20:30-31**).

HERE IS YOUR GOD

These miracles should cause each of us to say, "Here is your God" (**Isaiah 40:9**). The expression given by **Isaiah** in **40:9** is appropriate today in calling attention to God and Christ in the scheme of redemption. The KJV renders the Hebrew phrase (hN}h! <k#yh@Oa$ a$l)h@k#m h!nn@h) as "Behold your God" rather than "Here is your God" (NIV). Just as Isaiah told the children of Israel to "behold your God," (KJV), so John very well could have also written, "Behold your God" as he sought to make known this One who is called Jesus the Christ. One finds this unique expression within the context of a Messianic prophecy (**Isaiah 40:1-10**), which John also cites in **chapter one** of his **Gospel**. John the apostle discloses the testimony of John the Baptist's denial that he was "the Christ" (**John 1:20**).

After responding to questions concerning his identity (**20:21-22**), John the Baptist cites from **Isaiah 40:3**: "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" Even though John the Baptist did not cite the expression "Behold your God," nevertheless, John the apostle is saying this throughout his Gospel concerning Jesus. John begins his Gospel with the statement about Jesus' existence prior to the creation of the world: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning" (**John 1:1-2**). In other words, Jesus was One who was with the Father from all eternity past—"Behold your God."

John also calls attention to the uniqueness of His birth: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**1:14**; see also **Matthew 1:22-23**). Even though John did not use the word *virgin* in his description of God becoming flesh, nevertheless, just a casual reading of **John 1:14** sets forth this same teaching. Since Jesus was sinless, He alone could take away the sin of the world: "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

On every page of John's Gospel, one can see, as it were, the words: "Behold your God" from the words of Isaiah. Not only did John begin this Gospel with an announcement about Jesus' prior existence, but he also made reference to the fact that even though John the Baptist preceded Jesus by about six months in age, still Jesus existed before John the Baptist. Listen to the testimony from John the Baptist himself: "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'" (**1:30**)—"Behold your God."

John the apostle stacks evidence upon evidence in order to call attention to the deity of Jesus. Listen once more as the author of the Gospel of John as he reflects upon an incident that happened in the life of Nathanael (**John 1:43-51**). You remember the story, do you not? Philip had invited Nathanael to meet Jesus and he responded by saying, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (**1:46**). Whereupon Philip said: "Come and see" (**1:46**). Upon their arrival, Jesus says, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (**1:47**). This statement dumbfounded Nathanael. Thus, Nathanael answered back by saying, "How do you know me?" (**1:48a**). Jesus' comeback to Philip's question reveals the supernatural (miraculous powers): "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (**1:48b**). How

would you have reacted to such an amazing statement that is almost beyond belief? Would you have responded by saying, "Behold your God"? Listen to Philip's astonishment: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (**1:49**).

Just a casual reading of this wonderful story by John concerning Jesus should awaken a faith in every individual that says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God." But one's faith still does not stop with just that simple confession of faith. In other words, the evidence that John accumulates should generate trust—a trust that commits one's life to God with the whole heart. As one thinks about faith, one must never forget that there are two of kinds of faith—trust and obedience. Faith involves not only the intellectual side of humanity, but it also demands obedience (**John 15:1-13**). Following the prediction of Jesus' death, He told the crowd to put their trust "in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light" (**12:36**). Have you put your trust in Him in order that you, too, may become "sons of light"?

LIFE TOO DARK?

Do you think your life is too dark to become light? Can God use drunkards? Can God use prostitutes? Can God use thieves? Can God use liars? Can God use homosexuals? Can God use men and women who are just living together? Can God use individuals who are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice? Can God use gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful people? Can God use people who are senseless, faithless, heartless, or ruthless? Yes! It is true that people who commit such sins and atrocities are worthy of death. But is there hope? Yes, there is! Paul is a classic example of God's mercy. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, gives a brief biographical note about his earlier life:

> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. [13] Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. [14] The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [15] Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. [16] But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (**1 Timothy 1:12-16**).

Yes, there is hope for everyone who desires to put his or her trust in God for salvation. Jesus came to save the lost (**Matthew 1:21**). The words of Jesus to Nicodemus are an excellent commentary on Paul's own repulsive life against Christians prior to his conversion. Do you remember the words of Jesus to Nicodemus? If not, listen to Jesus as He describes God's love and patience:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through

him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**John 3:16-21**).

Gleams of Hope Found in John's Gospel

In the Gospel of John, one sees more than just His mighty miracles. One sees Him telling a ruler of Israel that he must be born again (**3:3**). One reads some of His greatest sermons (for examples, see **5:19-46**; **6:25-29**). One witnesses His forgiveness to a woman taken in adultery in the very act (**8:1-11**). One observes Jesus praying for His immediate disciples and for all those, in every age, who confess His name (**John 17**). In this Gospel, one can watch Him die and rise from the dead (**19:16-37; 20:1-9**). Nothing in the world can separate individuals who put their trust in Him from the love of God (**5:21-24;** see also **Romans 8:28-39**). Have you come to put your trust in Jesus? Have you come to know the love of God through Jesus? I invite you to trust Him. You will find Him sweet to your troubled soul and in the life to come.

CONCLUSION

Story of a Drunkard Who Accepted Christ

The story is told of a man who responded to Jesus during a revival meeting conducted by Dr. Wharton of Baltimore. Following the preaching, he extended an invitation. A drunkard came forward—dressed in shabby clothes—and asked, "Can Jesus do anything for me?" Whereupon Dr. Wharton assured him that Jesus could save him. They had prayer together and the man left. Some in the congregation told Dr. Wharton that this man had gone through a fortune and that his wife and children were in desperate need. Seven years later, while in this same city, he received a call from a man who invited him to his home. Dr. Wharton was informed that this man would send someone to pick him up. As he approached a beautiful home, a lovely woman and two children met him. A well-dressed man came down to meet him—a man, who seven years earlier—had been a drunkard and an outcast, but now a successful businessman and Christian. After spending an evening with this man, Dr. Wharton was told by this same man to tell people wherever he preached these words: "Wherever you go, tell people what Christ can do for a drunkard."

The Gospel is not only for drunkards, it is for everyone who will believe in the Son of God and will receive Him as their savior. John says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (**3:36**). In one of Jesus' sermons, He says, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (**6:40**). Do you want to do the work of God? If so,

then you should reflect upon the words of Jesus: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (**6:29**). In conclusion, remember the words of John:

> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. [31] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (**20:30-31**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

The "I Am" Sayings in Chapter Eight of the Gospel of John

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the One whom Abraham saw two thousand years before He came to earth.**

Scripture Reading: **John 8: 18, 24, 28, 58**

Only in the Gospel of John does one discover the startling "I am" statements. John records seven great "I am" (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi) announcements of Jesus (**6:35; 9:5; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1**). Each of the "I am" sayings is followed with a predicate—"the light of the world," and so on. These "I am" declarations indicate that one is dealing with someone who is deity. In addition to these seven assertions, one also reads of three statements in the **eighth chapter of the Gospel of John** (**8:24, 28, 58**) that sets forth in clear terms that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold would come into the world to save sinners—"I am He" (The pronoun "He" is added as a predicate nominative, even thought the I AM sayings in **vv. 24, 28**, and **58** are absolute—no predicate. These statements by Jesus unfold something of the greatness of this One that is called "the Christ" (οΣ Χριστοψ, &o cristos). He identifies Himself as the Messiah (Μεσσιψά, Messias), the savior of the world (**1:29-30**). Having said this, Jesus, in this very statement (εγωψ ειμι, egw eimi), discloses the truth of His Person--deity.

John does not argue the point of Christ's deity as he begins his Gospel. He simply states that Christ "was with (προψ, literally, "facing God") God in the beginning" and that Christ "was God" [θεοψ ης'ν οΣ λοψγö, qeos hn &o logos] (**John 1:1-2**). After stressing the deity of Christ in the Prologue (**1:1-18**), he gives evidence to substantiate his bold assertions about who Christ is as well as His preexistence (**1:14-18**). John the Baptist said, "He was before (ε[μπροσθεν, emprosqen) me" (**1:15**). John had a beginning in time, but there has never been a time in which Jesus never existed. In fact, He created time. John proves Jesus' deity by calling attention to the miraculous in Jesus' ministry, and, at the same time, John gives

the personal testimony of Jesus to substantiate His preexistence in order to prove that Jesus existed prior to the creation of this universe. Thus, from this testimony, John declares: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (**1:3**).[1]

This language of John is similar to the language of Paul to the Christians at Colossae. In this short epistle, Paul, too, speaks of the creation as a work of Christ: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things (προΨ παψψντων, pro pantwn), and in him all things hold together" (**Colossians 1:16-17**). John also records a prayer of Jesus—a prayer that occurred shortly before His trial—which is quite revealing, concerning His preexistence. In this prayer, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**John 17:5**).

The Gospel of John is loaded with information concerning the preexistence of Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus encountered some Jews who were antagonistic toward His remarks about God and Himself. In the ensuing conversation, He replied:

> If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad (**8:54-56**).

This affirmation by Jesus is amazing. Why? Well, He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham was born in 2166 BC; yet, Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen the day of Christ and was glad. How could this be? Abraham lived 2000 years before the birth of Jesus. In fact, the Jews questioned Him: "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (**8:57**). Jesus' answer to their statement is quite revealing concerning His true identity. In His response to the Jews, He testifies that He existed before Abraham (**8:58**) and that He is the One whom Abraham saw (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi, "I am he"). The I AM statement, as observed above, is an expression of deity. The Greek text is: "Before (πριψν, prin) Abraham became (γενεψσθαι, genesqai, "to become") I am (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi)." The aorist verb (genesqai) marks a historical point in time. On the other hand, Jesus uses the present tense to indicate that before Abraham's existence He Himself existed.

With this expression (egw eimi), an expression that is applied to God the Father in the Old Testament, Jesus is not saying that He is identical with the Father, but rather He is claiming that this unique expression may also be used of Him. In the **eight chapter of John** (**vv. 24, 28**), He does assert His Messiahship with this same expression. Not only did He assert his preexistence, but He also identified Himself as the One foretold by the prophets that would take away the sins of the world. Listen, once more, to Jesus as he boldly asserts: "before Abraham was born, I am! (εγωΨ ειμιψ, egw eimi)" (**8:58**). Abraham's time was time-bound. On the other hand, Jesus is not time-bound. With the "I AM" expression, Jesus points to His existence with God

beyond the bounds of time.[2] George Beasley-Murray expresses the significance of the egw eimi saying this way: "'Before Abraham came into existence I am' expresses 'the contrast between the existence initiated by birth and an absolute existence.'"[3]

The three occurrences of the "I AM" sayings (absolute) in **chapter eight** is found in the absolute, no predicate attached.[4] This confession (**8:58**) is the third of the "I am" (εςγωΨ ειςμι) statements in the **eighth chapter of John**. Did the Jews understand Jesus' declaration that He was the One to come as predicted by the prophets? Did they comprehend this unique expression to refer to deity? Yes, they did! They understood His words, but they did not believe His words. John records their swift reaction to these words: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (**8:59**).

Jesus identifies Himself as the One who came forth from the Father. Some rejected this truth and therefore condemned themselves (**8:42**). In contrast, there were some who put their faith in Him. Thus, Jesus said to the Jews who believed that He came from the Father and that He was the Christ: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). What truth (teaching) would they know? The Jews would know that Jesus is the One whom Abraham saw. They would know the truth that Jesus is the Son of Man. They would know the truth that He is God. They would know the truth (teaching) that Jesus is the One whom God sent into the world. That is to say, they would know that Jesus is the One He claimed to be. The word *truth* in **verse 32** is the same as the word *Son* in **verse 36**. The following chart in parallel columns illustrate graphically this truth:

John 8:31-32	**John 8:36-37**
To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Gail R. O'Day writes: "The truth is the presence of God in Jesus."[5] Again, she writes: "It shows a complete misunderstanding of the egw eimi saying. They think Jesus has merely omitted the predicate in an identification saying and grasp none of the theological overtones."[6] See the following chart for a comparison of the three εςγωΨ ειςμι sayings in **John 8.** One will observe, in all three versus, that one only finds the egw eimi sayings in the absolute, even though the NIV adds a predicate—"the one I claim to be" in two (**vv. 24** and **28**) of the three citations:

John 8:24	**John 8:28**	**John 8:58**
"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be	"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (εςγωΨ	"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered,"before Abraham was born, I am!" (εςγωΨ ειςμι)

(εςγωΨ ειςμι), you will indeed die in your sins."	ειςμι) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.	

Again, in **John** (**chapter 8**) there are four occurrences of the "I AM" (egw eimi) sayings; all, but one, are expressed in the absolute, no predicate given. This absolute saying is difficult to reproduce in English.[7] There are possibly three meanings that one could assign to this unique expression: (1) I am what I say I am—the light of the world, (2) I am He—the promised Messiah, and (3) I am—absolutely, the divine name. Even though all three ideas are present, nevertheless none are actually indicated. To those who refused to acknowledge this truth found in the egw eimi saying, Jesus said: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi), you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**).

To return again to the "I AM" statement in **8:28**, Jesus had just called to their attention a point in time in the future when many would acknowledge His claim to be from above and the One whom Abraham saw. John records the following words for his readers and for us:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (**8:28**).

The occurrence of the "I AM" in **8:28** is, as stated above, absolute, no predicate supplied. The NIV does supply a predicate by translating this as: "I am the one I claim to be." The NRSV supplies a pronoun as a predicate nominative ("I am he"). Even though these translations may be accurate according to the context, still one must remember that by adding the predicate, one alters the absolute egw eimi. Jesus identifies Himself with the divine name.[8] One can hardly read this prediction (**8:28**) of Jesus without reflection upon the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross. Mark gives the following reaction of this Centurion: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (**Mark 15:39**).

Generally, the "I am" (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi) saying in **John 8:58** is associated with **Exodus 3:14**, and there is validity to this assumption. God said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM (ςEγωψ ειςμι οΣ ω[ν, Egw eimi &o wn). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (**3:14**). The ejgw eimi is an Old Testament formula. The phrase is equivalent to "I am the Lord."[9] The εςγωψ ειςμι in the Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew aWh yn]a& (a&n!, hWa), which is the way God speaks (see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4) The Hebrew may carry a reference to the divine name hwhy (yhwh).[10]

This absolute occurs in several passages in the Gospel of John—**4:26; 6:20; 8: 24, 28, 58; 13:9; 18:5, 6, 8**. Perhaps, there is some justification for adding the predicate since the controversy was over whether or not Jesus is the Christ (**7:25-44**). But having said this, one must never forget that the egw eimi is absolute in the above references, even though sometimes, in other citations, one does observe the predicate, for example, **John 6:35**—"I am the bread of life." This essay does not deal with **8:18**, since this expression does not occur in the sections of controversy over who Jesus is.

Earlier, Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, used this same phrase—"I am he" (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi). In the course of this encounter, the woman responded to a statement of Jesus by saying: "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (**4:25**). In response to this statement about the Messiah, Jesus responded by saying: "I who speak to you am he (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi)" (**4:26**). Jesus states emphatically that He is the One that she and others were looking to come. Pay attention to **4:26** once more: "Jesus says to her: "I am (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi, "I am he") the one speaking to you" (my translation—RDB). The "I am" statement in **John 4:26** is equivalent to the three identical phrases found in **John chapter eight** (**vv. 23, 28, 58**).

In the **seventh chapter of John**, Jesus emphasizes His origin and His mission. At the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), Jesus began to teach. As a result of this teaching, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'" (**7:15**). Whereupon Jesus responds by saying: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (**7:16**). Following His discourse, some asked the question concerning His identity. John records the following response from the people as to whether or not He really is the Christ:

> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from" (**7:25-26**).

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), Jesus stood and said in a loud voice: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (**7:37-38**). Again, almost immediately, the people said, '"Surely this man is the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Christ.'" In **Chapter eight of John's Gospel**, Jesus gives testimony as to His preexistence and to His being the Christ whom God sent. Three times in this chapter, Jesus uses the expression: εγωΨ ειμι (**8:24, 28, 58**) in the absolute. The salvation of the Jews depended upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the savior of the world. Pay attention to Jesus as He issues His warning against the Jews: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am (εγωΨ ειμι) the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**). The Jews demanded to know "Who are you?" (**8:25**). Thus, the translators provided the predicate for the "I am" in order to complete the sense of Jesus' response.

The NIV added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." This translation captures the essence of **verse 24**. Unless they accepted the fact that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, they would die in their sins. Repetition is unavoidable in this study. It is necessary to call to mind certain Scriptures over and over again in order to draw attention to the significance of **John 8:58**. One's salvation hinges upon one's acceptance of Jesus as the One the prophets spoke of. Still, many Jews did not understand, so Jesus again explains His relationship with the Father:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (εςγωΨ ειςμι) the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (**8:28**).

Once more the NIV translators, in order to make clear the sense of the passage, added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." As a result of the words of Jesus, John says, "many put their faith in him" (**8:30**). Then to the Jews who believed, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). What truth would make them free? If they accepted the truth that Jesus had come from the Father and that He was the Christ, then they would not die in their sins. In other words, if they accepted that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, then they could have eternal life—acceptance of this truth would set them free.

One must accept this teaching if he or she wishes eternal life. Jesus went on to say: "So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (**8:36**). Many of the Jews just refused to accept Jesus. In fact, some cried out: "Abraham is our father" (**8:39**). Jesus responds to their statement by saying:

> "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. [40] As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. [41] You are doing the things your own father does" (**8:39-41a**)

How did Abraham react to the announcement concerning the coming of the Messiah? He rejoiced and was glad. On the other hand, the Jews sought to kill Jesus. Thus, the Jews who refused to believe were of their father, the devil. In response to their negative reaction as to His claims, Jesus said to them:

> If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. [43] Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. [44] You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! [46] Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? [47] He who belongs to God hears

what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God (**8:42-47**).

Many did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them. Certainly, Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah. More conversation follows these remarks in **8:42-47**. Jesus zeros in on Abraham's faith. He told the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (**8:56**). They were dumbfounded by this comment. They questioned Him by saying: "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" (**8:57**). Then Jesus issued a statement that cemented His claim about being the Messiah sent forth from God: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am [εςγωΨ ειςμι] (**8:58**). ΣΕγωψ ειςμι = "I exist." Yes, Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah by saying: "I am he" (egw eimi, **vv. 24, 28**). Jesus is saying, in effect, that I am the One that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (**8:56**).

CONCLUSION

In **John 8:24, 28,** and **58**, Jesus is simply saying, "I am he" (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi). In other words, I am the One that Abraham saw. Jesus not only proclaimed His preexistence, but He also proclaimed Himself as the One whom Abraham foresaw. Is it any wonder that Jesus said that if you do not believe that "I am he," you will die in your sins? Have you accepted this One who is called God (**John 1:1**)? Have you accepted this One who created all things (**1:2**)? Have you accepted the One who turned water into wine (**2:1-11**)? Have you accepted the One who walked on water (**6:16-21**)?

Have you accepted the One who raised Lazarus from the dead (**11:38-44**)? Have you accepted the One who cured the eyesight of one born blind (**9:1-12**)? Have you accepted the One who fed 5000 with just five small loaves and two fishes (**6:1-15**)? If not, why not accept Him so that you may have eternal life (**8:31-32**)? Do you believe that before Abraham was born that Jesus existed? Do you believe that Jesus is the "I AM" of **John 8:58**? If so, then you need to acknowledge this truth and become a disciple of the Messiah, the savior of the world (**3:16-21**). His miracles prove His assertion—egw eimi.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] See Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John* in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 646. I am indebted to her insights for her discussion of the predicate added by translators to the absolute egw eimi (see page 634).

[3] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol., 36 (Waco: Texas: Work Books, 1987), 139.

[4] In 8:18, there is an egw eimi statement, but this egw eimi is not absolute; it has a predicate attached to it—"who testifies for myself."

[5] Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*., 637.

[6] Ibid., 634.

[7] See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Revised, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 397.

[8] O' Day, *The Gospel of John*, 634.

[9] See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 130.

[10] See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 420.

The Truth Will Set You Free

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the Truth that will make one free.**

Scripture Reading: **John 8: 32**

INTRODUCTION

One of the best-known Scriptures, at least within the Churches of Christ, is a statement by Jesus: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**John 8:32**).[1] This Scripture is frequently employed by many sincere Christians in order to justify their separation from other Christians over what they conceive to be "truth," that is to say, their particular brand of orthodoxy. The question that confronts every Christian is this: What is "the truth" that Jesus alludes to? Is this "truth" dogmatic truth? Is it right orthodoxy? Is this "truth" abstract truth? Is this "truth" simply an understanding of intellectual knowledge of facts recorded in the Bible? As one approaches this well-known passage, one faces the influence of preunderstanding in one's interpretation. The abuse of this Scripture, in many instances, has fractured the Body of Christ into warring factions, each claiming to be the only ones who have a handle on the "truth" that Jesus speaks about in **John 8:32**. This essay is not designed to castigate God's people for their lack of understanding, but rather the purpose of this paper is to help break down the barriers that separates the ones for whom Christ died.[2]

E. D. Hirsch enunciates a basic principle of interpretation that one must apply in the interpretation of any text: "Meaning is that which is represented by a text."[3] Hirsch is simply saying that the meaning of any wording is the author's meaning, not the interpreter's. Today, one should reject the traditional interpretation of **John 8:32** because it is wrong. This "truth" is not one's party slant. It is Jesus! Whenever an interpreter discards the meaning of the author, the interpreter takes over the place of the author—this leads to confusion and division among God's people. When one

begins with a faulty foundation (conception or impression) about what the text is saying, one is able to find all his or her viewpoints. After one throws out the context, one is without a guidepost to steer him or her in an accurate awareness of the author's intent.

As soon as one comes within reach of **John 8:32**, one must not move toward this text with strong subjective biases. In one's advance toward this Scripture, one must not isolate this text from its context. It is not uncommon for Christians to view the Bible as a series of unrelated verses. It is not exceptional for God's children to habitually proof-text Scriptures in order to give validity to their doctrinal beliefs. Cedric B. Johnson is correct when he writes: '"A proof-texting' approach is a poor way to discover the meaning of Scriptures."[4] This kind of theology is hollow and empty. People want to hear again about the saving revelation of God as revealed in His Holy Word—Jesus Christ, the mediator of the divine covenant of grace. In many fellowships, one witnesses the "paper pope" (religious journals—not all, but some) In this system of orthodoxy, one observes that, for many, faith is commonly identified with the traditions of the church—both faith and traditions become identical.

Leroy Garrett, as early as 1976, called attention to the abuse of this passage. He briefly comments on this penetrating passage, along with many others, in order to bring individuals back to the true intent of Jesus' words. Listen to Garrett's insightful words as he seeks to unfold the original intent:

> Also in my file is a tearsheet from one of our papers on *what is truth?* It reminds one of how terribly we have abused this term, applying it, for the most part to our particular party slant. You are loyal to "the truth" if you are accapella or amillennial or noncooperative—or faithful to what the Christian Church or Church of Christ teaches. There are of course many truths in Scripture, and we must be faithful to all of them that we understand. Some of these are obviously more important than others. But "the truth" is something else, and I can't believe that when Jesus said "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" that he was referring to all the truths of revelation. He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth. When one knows that truth, when he knows Jesus, he is free, not until. It doesn't matter how full his head may be of the many truths of Scripture or how faithfully he interprets all the doctrine. If his heart is empty of the truth, which is the Person of Jesus dwelling in our hearts through faith, then all else is vain.[5]

Garrett strips away all extraneous matter when he writes: "He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth." Did Garrett just decide the meaning of "the truth" subjectively or did he examine the context objectively? A word of caution is in order when anyone approaches God's Word. As stated above, one should never proof-text as his or her method of interpretation. It is not sufficient to just quote a passage; one must consider its historical context. Since the Word comes to one in the form of a past context, one should examine the Scriptures before and after the text under examination in order to draw from the Scriptures what God says to His people. **John 8:32** is frequently limited by the predetermined interpretive grid (brand of orthodoxy/party slant). Just a perusal

of many Church of Christ journals reveals that the various factions within the Churches of Christ lay claim to this Scripture as their own. As a result of this mindset, many saints confuse their view of Scripture with their own interpretation—an interpretation that is identified as "the truth." From this kind of reasoning, if one disagrees, one is then described as *unsound*.

Before this author analyzes the context for **John 8:32**, perhaps it would be helpful to call attention to the fact that this author grew up in a fellowship in which this passage was cited to justify separation from every believer that dared to disagree with the status quo of this odd fellowship.[6] As a young man, I was associated with the one cup and nonSunday school fellowship. I cited this passage to prove that if one wanted freedom then one had to give up individual cups, Sunday school, instrumental music, wine in the Lord's Supper, breaking of the bread,[7] and so on. In the prevailing attitude of this fellowship, Christians did not recognize the distinction between the Word of God and its traditions (doctrine), which is also true of many other Churches of Christ outside this small group of believers. One of the basic errors of this sincere fellowship consisted in an overvaluation of doctrine of the church rather than proclamation of Jesus and Him crucified. This fellowship confused the proclamation of the Good News with their brand of accepted beliefs.

As one examines the preaching of the apostles, one discovers that the missionary proclamation of the apostles has only a distant relationship to what takes place in the pulpit of many churches today. What takes place in countless churches today has very little to do with what the Bible calls "proclaiming the Word." Just recently, I read a chapter in a book on missionary activities—yet to be published—in which the author stressed the sinfulness of handclapping in the assembly, contemporary singing in the congregation, instrumental music in congregational singing,[8] preachers preaching from the floor in order to be closer to the congregation, women participating in the assembly,[9] and so on.[10] Ultimately, this dear brother concludes that anyone who is not in his camp on these issues is in the camp of the post-modernist. It is not uncommon for Christians of this mindset to cite **John 8:32** to give credence to their position of the nature of "truth." Those who wish to discard the false identification of doctrine with the Word of God—the Gospel of God—are castigated with the anathema of "post-modernist" or "digressive" or "unsound" in THE FAITH.

Countless churches no longer understand themselves as missionary churches. The churches, as a whole, have put so much emphasis upon right doctrine that they have ceased to emphasize discipleship. Within many fellowships, especially within some Churches of Christ, so much emphasis is placed upon the "true church" or the "Lord's church"[11] that the true purpose of the Christian community has been lost—proclamation of God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ—who is "the Truth" that sets one free (**John 8:32**). Just a casual reading of the Sermons in the **Book of Acts** reveals the distinction between the preaching of the apostles and the preaching of he modern day church, especially within some of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. It is in this vein that Emil Brunner says,

> The truth of which the Bible speaks is always a happening, and indeed the happening of the meeting between God and man, an act of God which must be received by an act of man. The truth acting—this is the characteristic

unphilosophical, non-Greek way in which the Bible speaks of truth. In the measure that this understanding of truth again becomes alive in it, the Church will itself be renewed again into the true Church. For this renascence we are hoping.[12]

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST SEVEN CHAPTERS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

If one is to interpret **John 8:32** correctly, one must treat this text within its full unit of meaning. The safest way for one to be sure that the Scriptures support his or her own position is to ignore the context. In order for one to understand the meaning of Jesus' words in **John 8:32**, one must unpack the background leading up to the text in question. John begins his Gospel with the identity of this One who is called Jesus:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it (**John 1:1-4**).

In these four verses, John goes right to the heart of the One who will set one free. This One is none other than the One whom John writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**1:14**). This verse reveals that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. In other words, Jesus is the centerpiece of history: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you really knew me, you would know[a] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (**John 14:6**). Jesus is the single way to God. It is only in Jesus Christ that one finds freedom from God's wrath. For one to deny this message about Jesus, while, at the same time, pursuing spirituality, one simply conjures up an imaginary religion—one that is fatal. Only the Son of God can make one free.

The Prologue to John reveals that the message about Christ is not just an introduction to a religion, but rather it is an introduction to the truth about the reality of God and His love for humanity. Following the Prologue, John zeros in on the ministry of John the Baptist (**1:19-28**). In this pericope (unit of Scripture), John denies that he is "the Christ" (**1:20**). After this encounter, John sees Jesus coming and exclaims: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (**1:29**)! The day following this confession of John, John again calls attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God (**1:36**). Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, heard John speak and immediately found Peter and told him that he had found "the Messiah (that is, the Christ)" (**1:40-42**). The next day, Philip also found Nathanael and told him about the Messiah (**1:43-51**). After this meeting with Jesus, Nathanael confessed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (**1:49**).

In Chapter two of the Gospel of John, John writes about Jesus changing water into wine (**2:1-11**) and about His clearing the Temple of those making merchandise of

God's holy place (**2:12-25**). In this pericope (Jesus Clears the Temple), Jesus encounters rejection by the Jews. In spite of this negative response by the Jews, Jesus still performed many miracles while in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast (**2:23**). Many came to the conclusion that Jesus is the answer to man's slavery to sin—"many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name" (**2:23**). Chapter three opens with Nicodemus coming to Jesus (**3:1-2**). During his conversation with Jesus, Jesus tells Nicodemus that

> God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.[g] [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**3:16-21**).[h]

Surely, **John 3:16-21** is a commentary on **John 8:31-32** and **8:36-37**:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (**8:31-32**).	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word (**8:36-37**).

If one refuses this teaching—Jesus came from God to save the world—one will perish. Freedom from condemnation can only be found in one's acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God, the savior of the world. Again, after this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, John gives John the Baptist' testimony about Jesus (**3:22-36**). In this testimony John goes right to the heart of Jesus' teaching:

> The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. [32] He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. [33] The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. [34] For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God[e] gives the Spirit without limit. [35] The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. [36] Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him[d] (**3:31-36**).

If one rejects this teaching that Jesus is "The one who comes from above," this one will perish "for God's wrath remains on him." It is only the Son of God who can set one free from the wrath of God. In the very next Chapter, one observes that the Samaritan woman believed this testimony (**4:1-26**). Not only did she believe this teaching—"I who speak to you am he" (**1:28**)—but many of the Samaritans also believed that Jesus was the Messiah (**4:39-42**). In Chapter five, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (**5:1-15**). As a result of this healing on the Sabbath, the Jews sought to persecute Jesus. The Jews reasoned that since He forgave sins, this statement made Jesus equal with God (**5:18**). Again, Jesus explains His teachings about His relationship to the Father:

> I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. [21] For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. [22] Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, [23] that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him (**5:19-23**).

If one refuses to accept and abide in this teaching, God's wrath abides upon that person. Once more, Jesus strips away all the underbrush and goes right to the heart of eternal salvation: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (**5:24**). As one turns to Chapter six, John reveals that Jesus fed five thousand with just "five small barley loaves and two small fish" (**6:1-8**). Those who witnessed this miracle exclaimed: "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (**6:14**). Following Jesus' walking on water (**6:16-24**), the crowd found Him on the other side of the lake (**6:25**). Jesus reflects upon the earlier miracle of feeding the five thousand and refers to Himself as "the bread of life" (**6:35**). In the flow of the conversation with Jesus, they inquired: "What must we do to do the works God requires" (**6:28**). Jesus responds with piercing words about His identity: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (**6:29**).

If one wishes to know what the teaching is that Jesus speaks of in **8:31**, one should reflect once more on Jesus' words to the crowd that He had previously fed. Listen to the words of Jesus as He seeks to call attention to Himself in the scheme of redemption:

> I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. [36] But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. [38] For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. [40] For my Father's

will is that **everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him** shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (**6:35-40**).

If one "looks to the Son and believes in him," that one "shall have eternal life." It is only in the Son of God that one finds freedom from God's wrath. In Chapter six, one also reads about the desertion of many of His disciples, individuals who rejected His teachings about Himself (**6:53-66**). In Chapter 7, John records that Jesus went to the Feast of the Tabernacles (**7:1-13**). While at this Feast, Jesus teaches (**7:14-24**). About halfway through the Feast, Jesus goes into the temple courts and begins to teach (**7:14**). As result of His teachings, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied" (**7:15**). In reaction to their question, Jesus responded by saying:

> My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. [17] If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether **my teaching** comes from God or whether I speak on my own. [18] He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. [19] Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me (**7:16-19**)?

Many Jews rejected this teaching about Jesus' deity. They rejected Him as the One that the Prophets foretold would come to take away the sins of the world. John focuses once more on the identity of Jesus by reporting the reaction of the people to Jesus:

> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ[a]? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from (**7:25-27**).

Is Jesus the Christ? Some said "yes," but others said "no." Following this conversation in **7:25-27**, John, once more, calls attention to Jesus' teaching. Pay attention to the words of Jesus as He again identifies Himself: "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, [29] but I know him because I am from him and he sent me" (**7:28-29**). After this encounter, each went to his own home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives (**8:1**). When dawn came, Jesus, once more, went to the temple courts where the people gathered around him and He taught them (**8:2**). In this teaching, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world, Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**8:12**).

The Pharisees challenged this teaching (**8:13**). But Jesus did not for one moment shrink back from this teaching. He plowed ahead, as it were, with the truth of His teachings:

> Even if I testify on my own behalf, **my testimony** is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from

or where I am going. [15] You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. [16] But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. [17] In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. [18] I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me (**8:14-18**).

The Pharisees rejected this teaching. But Jesus continued to drive home the point that without belief in Him, one could not be free. Jesus says, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**). In spite of this rejection by the religious leaders, nevertheless, there were Jews who believed His teachings about His having come from the Father to give eternal life to those who believe in Him (**8:31**). Listen to Jesus as He says, "If you hold to **my teaching**, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). Then Jesus drops the bombshell on His listeners:

I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. [35] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. [38] I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father[b] (**8:34-38**).

THE "I AM" STATEMENTS

With the above examination of the first seven chapters in John leading up to **8:32**, this focus should assist one in understanding the "I AM" statement as a reference point in approaching **John 8:32.** The preceding discussion about Jesus' statements concerning Himself is necessary in order to fully grasp the significance of this now famous verse (**8:32**). The "I am" statements in the Gospel of John should enhance one's understanding of what Jesus really meant by "the truth will make you free." Only in the Gospel of John does one discover the startling "I am" statements. John records seven great "I am" (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi) announcements of Jesus (**6:35; 9:5; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1**). Each of the "I am" sayings is followed with a predicate nominative—"the light of the world," and so on. These "I am" declarations indicate that one is dealing with someone who is deity. In addition to these seven assertions, one also reads of three statements in the **eighth chapter of the Gospel of John** (**8:24, 28, 58**) that sets forth in clear terms that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold would come into the world to save sinners—"I am He" (The pronoun "He" is added as a predicate nominative, even thought the I AM sayings in **vv. 24, 28**, and **58** are absolute—no predicate. These statements by Jesus unfold something of the greatness of this One that is called "the Christ" (οΣ Χριστοψ, &o cristos). He identifies Himself as the Messiah (Μεσσιψά, Messias), the savior of the world (**1:29-30**). Having said this, Jesus, in this very statement (εγωψ ειμι, egw eimi), discloses the truth of His Person—deity.

John does not argue the point of Christ's deity as he begins his Gospel. He simply states that Christ "was with (προψ, literally, "facing God") God in the beginning" and that Christ "was God" [θεοψ ης'ν οΣ λοψγö, qeos hn &o logos] (**John 1:1-2**). After stressing the deity of Christ in the Prologue (**1:1-18**), he gives evidence to substantiate his bold assertions about who Christ is as well as His preexistence (**1:14-18**). John the Baptist said, "He was before (ε[μπροσθεν, emprosqen) me" (**1:15**). John had a beginning in time, but there has never been a time in which Jesus never existed. In fact, He created time. John proves Jesus' deity by calling attention to the miraculous in Jesus' ministry, and, at the same time, John gives the personal testimony of Jesus to substantiate His preexistence in order to prove that Jesus existed prior to the creation of this universe. Thus, from this testimony, John declares: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (**1:3**).

This language of John is similar to the language of Paul to the Christians at Colossae. In this short epistle, Paul, too, speaks of the creation as a work of Christ: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. [17] He is before all things (προΨ παψψντων, pro pantwn), and in him all things hold together" (**Colossians 1:16-17**). John also records a prayer of Jesus—a prayer that occurred shortly before His trial—which is quite revealing, concerning His preexistence. In this prayer, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**John 17:5**).

The Gospel of John is loaded with information concerning the preexistence of Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus encountered some Jews who were antagonistic toward His remarks about God and Himself. In the ensuing conversation, He replied:

> If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. [55] Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad (**8:54-56**).

This affirmation by Jesus is amazing. Why? Well, He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham was born in 2166 BC;[13] yet, Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen the day of Christ and was glad. How could this be? Abraham lived 2000 years before the birth of Jesus. In fact, the Jews questioned Him: "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (**8:57**). Jesus' answer to their statement is quite revealing concerning His true identity. In His response to the Jews, He testifies that He existed before Abraham (**8:58**) and that He is the One whom Abraham saw (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi, "I am he"). The I AM statement, as observed above, is an expression of deity. The Greek text is: "Before (πριψν, prin) Abraham became (γενεψσθαι, genesqai, "to become") I am (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi)." The aorist verb (genesqai) marks a historical point in time. On the other hand, Jesus uses the present tense to indicate that before Abraham's existence He Himself existed.

With this expression (egw eimi), an expression that is applied to God the Father in the Old Testament, Jesus is not saying that He is identical with the Father, but rather He is claiming that this unique expression may also be used of Him. In the **eighth chapter of John** (**vv. 24, 28**), He does assert His Messiahship with this same expression. Not only did He assert his preexistence, but He also identified Himself as the One foretold by the prophets that would take away the sins of the world. Listen, once more, to Jesus as he boldly asserts: "before Abraham was born, I am! (εϛγωΨ ειϛμιψ, egw eimi)" (**8:58**). Abraham's time was time-bound. On the other hand, Jesus is not time-bound. With the "I AM" expression, Jesus points to His existence with God beyond the bounds of time.[14] George Beasley-Murray expresses the significance of the egw eimi saying this way: '"Before Abraham came into existence I am' expresses 'the contrast between the existence initiated by birth and an absolute existence.'"[15]

The three occurrences of the "I AM" sayings (absolute) in **chapter eight** is found in the absolute, no predicate attached.[16] This confession (**8:58**) is the third of the "I am" (εϛγωΨ ειϛμι) statements in the **eighth chapter of John**. Did the Jews understand Jesus' declaration that He was the One to come as predicted by the prophets? Did they comprehend this unique expression to refer to deity? Yes, they did! They understood His words, but they did not believe His words. John records their swift reaction to these words: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (**8:59**). The Jews refused to hold/accept the teaching of Jesus about His identity (**8:31**).

JESUS IS THE TRUTH

As one examines the Christian faith, one can say that the Christian faith is faith in Jesus as "the truth." For one to say that Jesus is the content of truth is a radical departure from the ordinary concept of truth. In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, John writes: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (**John 1:17**). With Jesus, truth came into being. Truth is something that happens; in other words, it is something God does. It is in Jesus that grace and truth reaches its pinnacle—grace and truth come to realization. In one's reflection upon the Incarnation, one understands that this supernatural birth is not the pivotal point of the biblical revelation, but rather the work of the redeemer that results in salvation for sinful humanity.

The Gospel of John guides one in understanding the "mystery of God," which is Jesus Christ (See also **Colossians 1:27—2:2**). The Person of the Mediator must be understood as an act of God—an act designed to set men and women free from condemnation (See also **Romans 5:1-2; 8:1**). In the Gospel, one observes that God reveals Himself in Him—"the Truth." God also reconciles the world unto Himself in Him—"the Truth." It is in Him that God redeems humanity (See also **2 Corinthians 5:17-19**). Jesus is God's act of atonement for sinful humanity. It is in and through His Son that God gives freedom. It is in and through His Son that God gives Himself. Again, one can say that the sufferings of Christ—His passion—is the act of God in which He gives Himself and establishes fellowship with both men and women. Is it any wonder that Jesus went to the very heart of redemption when He startled His disciples with the following words:

You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins (**John 8:23-24**).

Jesus identifies Himself as the One who came forth from the Father. Some rejected this truth and therefore condemned themselves (**8:42**). In contrast, there were some who put their faith in Him. Thus, Jesus said to the Jews who believed that He came from the Father and that He was the Christ: "If you hold to **my teaching**, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). What truth (teaching) would they know? The Jews would know that Jesus is the One whom Abraham saw. They would know the truth that Jesus is the Son of Man. They would know the truth that He is God. They would know the truth (teaching) that Jesus is the One whom God sent into the world. They would know that He is from above. That is to say, they would know that Jesus is the One He claimed to be. The word *truth* in **verse 32** is the same as the word *Son* in **verse 36**. The following chart in parallel columns illustrate graphically this truth:

John 8:31-32	**John 8:36-37**
To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Gail R. O'Day writes: "The truth is the presence of God in Jesus."[17] Again, she writes: "It shows a complete misunderstanding of the egw eimi saying. They think Jesus has merely omitted the predicate in an identification saying and grasp none of the theological overtones."[18] See the following chart for a comparison of the three εγωΨ ειμι sayings in **John 8.** One will observe, in all three verses, that one only finds the egw eimi sayings in the absolute, even though the NIV adds a predicate—"the one I claim to be" in two (**vv. 24** and **28**) of the three citations:

John 8:24	**John 8:28**	**John 8:58**
"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (εγωΨ ειμι), you will indeed die in your sins."	"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (εγωΨ ειμι) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.	"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered,"before Abraham was born, I am!" (εγωΨ ειμι)

Again, in **John** (**chapter 8**) there are four occurrences of the "I AM" (egw eimi) sayings; all, but one, are expressed in the absolute, no predicate given. This

absolute saying is difficult to reproduce in English.[19] There are possibly three meanings that one could assign to this unique expression: (1) I am what I say I am—the light of the world, (2) I am He—the promised Messiah, and (3) I am—absolutely, the divine name. Even though all three ideas are present, nevertheless none are actually indicated. To those who refused to acknowledge this truth found in the egw eimi saying, Jesus said: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi), you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**).

To return again to the "I AM" statement in **8:28**, Jesus had just called to their attention a point in time in the future when many would acknowledge His claim to be from above and the One whom Abraham saw. John records the following words for his readers and for us:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (**8:28**).

The occurrence of the "I AM" in **8:28** is, as stated above, absolute, no predicate supplied. The NIV does supply a predicate by translating this as: "I am the one I claim to be." The NRSV supplies a pronoun as a predicate nominative ("I am he"). Even though these translations may be accurate according to the context, still one must remember that by adding the predicate, one alters the absolute egw eimi. Jesus identifies Himself with the divine name.[20] One can hardly read this prediction (**8:28**) of Jesus without reflection upon the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross. Mark gives the following reaction of this Centurion: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (**Mark 15:39**).

Generally, the "I am" (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi) saying in **John 8:58** is associated with **Exodus 3:14**, and there is validity to this assumption. God said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM (ςΕγωψ ειςμι οΣ ω[ν, Egw eimi &o wn). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (**3:14**). The ejgw eimi is an Old Testament formula. The phrase is equivalent to "I am the Lord."[21] The εςγωψ ειςμι in the Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew aWh yn]a& (a&n!, hWa), which is the way God speaks (see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4). The Hebrew may carry a reference to the divine name hwhy (yhwh).[22]

This absolute occurs in several passages in the Gospel of John—**4:26; 6:20; 8: 24, 28, 58; 13:9; 18:5, 6, 8**. Perhaps, there is some justification for adding the predicate since the controversy was over whether or not Jesus is the Christ (**7:25-44**). But having said this, one must never forget that the egw eimi is absolute in the above references, even though sometimes, in other citations, one does observe the predicate, for example, **John 6:35**—"I am the bread of life." This essay does not deal with **8:18**, since this expression does not occur in the sections of controversy over who Jesus is.

Earlier, Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, used this same phrase—"I am he" (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi). In the course of this encounter, the woman responded to a statement of Jesus by saying: "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (**4:25**). In response to this statement about the Messiah, Jesus responded by saying: "I who speak to you am he (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi)" (**4:26**). Jesus states emphatically that He is the One that she and others were looking to come. Pay attention to **4:26** once more: "Jesus says to her: "I am (εγωΨ ειμι, egw eimi, "I am he") the one speaking to you" (my translation—RDB). The "I am" statement in **John 4:26** is equivalent to the three identical phrases found in **John chapter eight** (**vv. 23, 28, 58**).

In the **seventh chapter of John**, Jesus emphasizes His origin and His mission. At the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), Jesus began to teach. As a result of this teaching, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'" (**7:15**). Whereupon Jesus responds by saying: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (**7:16**). Following His discourse, some asked the question concerning His identity. John records the following response from the people as to whether or not He really is the Christ:

> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from" (**7:25-26**).

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), Jesus stood and said in a loud voice: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (**7:37-38**). Again, almost immediately, the people said, '"Surely this man is the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Christ.'" In **Chapter eight of John's Gospel**, Jesus gives testimony as to His preexistence and to His being the Christ whom God sent. Three times in this chapter, Jesus uses the expression: εγωΨ ειμι (**8:24, 28, 58**) in the absolute. The salvation of the Jews depended upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the savior of the world. Pay attention to Jesus as He issues His warning against the Jews: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am (εγωΨ ειμι) the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**). The Jews demanded to know "Who are you?" (**8:25**). Thus, the translators provided the predicate for the "I am" in order to complete the sense of Jesus' response.

The NIV added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." This translation captures the essence of **verse 24**. Unless they accepted the fact that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, they would die in their sins. Repetition is unavoidable in this study. It is necessary to call to mind certain Scriptures over and over again in order to draw attention to the significance of **John 8:58**. One's salvation hinges upon one's acceptance of Jesus as the One the prophets spoke of. Still, many Jews did not understand, so Jesus again explains His relationship with the Father:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (εςγωΨ ειςμι) the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (**8:28**).

Once more the NIV translators, in order to make clear the sense of the passage, added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." As a result of the words of Jesus, John says, "many put their faith in him" (**8:30**). Then to the Jews who believed, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**8:31-32**). What truth would make them free? If they accepted the truth that Jesus had come from the Father and that He was the Christ, then they would not die in their sins. In other words, if they accepted that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, then they could have eternal life—acceptance of this truth would set them free.

One must accept this teaching if he or she wishes eternal life. Jesus went on to say: "So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (**8:36**). Many of the Jews just refused to accept Jesus. In fact, some cried out: "Abraham is our father" (**8:39**). Jesus responds to their statement by saying:

> "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. [40] As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. [41] You are doing the things your own father does" (**8:39-41a**)

How did Abraham react to the announcement concerning the coming of the Messiah? He rejoiced and was glad. On the other hand, the Jews sought to kill Jesus. Thus, the Jews who refused to believe were of their father, the devil. In response to their negative reaction as to His claims, Jesus said to them:

> If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. [43] Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. [44] You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! [46] Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? [47] He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God (**8:42-47**).

CONCLUSION

Many did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them. Certainly, Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah. More conversation follows these remarks in **8:42-47**. Jesus zeros in on Abraham's faith. He told the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (**8:56**). They were dumbfounded by this comment. They questioned Him by saying: "You are

not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" (**8:57**). Then Jesus issued a statement that cemented His claim about being the Messiah sent forth from God: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am [εςγωΨ ειςμι] (**8:58**). ΣΕγωψ ειςμι = "I exist." Yes, Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah by saying: "I am he" (egw eimi, **vv. 24, 28**). Jesus is saying, in effect, that I am the One that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (**8:56**). Emil Brunner captures the essence of the coming of Jesus in his remarks in his book, *The Mediator*:

> The assault of God upon the world is Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of revelation and atonement. He is the Divine King who thus establishes His sovereignty, and is so doing sets humanity free from the powers which are hostile to God and therefore also hostile to life.[23]

In **John 8:24, 28,** and **58**, Jesus is simply saying, "I am he" (εςγωΨ ειςμι, egw eimi). In other words, I am the One whom Abraham saw. Jesus not only proclaimed His preexistence, but He also proclaimed Himself as the One whom Abraham foresaw. Is it any wonder that Jesus said that if you do not believe that "I am he," you will die in your sins? Have you accepted this One who is called God (**John 1:1**)? Have you accepted this One who created all things (**1:2**)? Have you received the One who turned water into wine (**2:1-11**)? Have you acknowledged the One who walked on water (**6:16-21**)?

Have you recognized the One who raised Lazarus from the dead (**11:38-44**)? Have you trusted in the One who cured the eyesight of one born blind (**9:1-12**)? Have you accepted the One who fed 5000 with just five small loaves and two fishes (**6:1-15**)? If not, why not receive Him so that you may have eternal life (**8:31-32**)? Do you believe that before Abraham was born that Jesus existed? Do you believe that Jesus is the "I AM" of **John 8:58**? If so, then you need to acknowledge this truth and become a disciple of the Messiah, the savior of the world (**3:16-21**). His miracles prove His assertion—egw eimi.

> 31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my
> teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and
> the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's
> descendants[a] and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that
> we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who
> sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family,
> but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free
> indeed. 37 I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill
> me, because you have no room for my word. 38 I am telling you what I have
> seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your
> father" [b] (**8:31-37**).

[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] This essay is rather lengthy, but this drawn-out discussion is necessary in order to lead individual into the true meaning of the text. When one tries to eliminate traditions, one must go to great lengths in order to unfold the author's intent. For this reason, this author has taken a great deal of space to analyze the first seven chapters of the Gospel of John in order to nail down the meaning one should attach to Jesus' words about "the truth shall set you free."

[3] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1967), 8.

[4] Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

[5] Leroy Garrett, "Some of the Left Over Passages," *Restoration Review* 18, No. 10 (December 1976): 283.

[6] Even though I am calling attention to the abuse of this Scripture in my earlier traditions, I still must say that the ones who taught me were sincere and godly men. Many of these preachers are now with the Lord; they have crossed the great gulf between God and humanity. I have been extremely fortunate to have been exposed to the science of interpretation. As a result of having been exposed to the science of interpretation, this author has been able to avoid the many pitfalls of the forefathers in the Stone/Campbell Movement. It goes, almost without saying, that perfect understanding of God's Holy Word is not essential to salvation. But what God is concerned about is whether one loves Him. Listen to Paul as he seeks to draw attention to what it is all about:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But the man who loves God is known by God (**1 Corinthians 8:1-3**).

[7] This particular group "pinches" the bread rather than "breaks" the bread. If one broke the bread, one broke the bones of Jesus and violated the Scripture that states that not a bone of Him shall be broken.

[8] For an examination of the subject of instrumental music in the Christian assembly, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed May 6, 2004] located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under OLD TESTAMENT and then under PSALMS.

[9] This same brother will allow women to stand in the pulpit and translate his message by their preaching to the congregation in the native language of the hearers. For some strange reason, this practice does not violate the Scriptures, according to him, but if a woman speaks to the congregation without being an interpreter, she sins. This man is a very godly man, but, so it appears to me, has not yet grasped what the kingdom is all about. This practice of women speaking as interpreters is frequently done in Russia. This author (Dallas Burdette) is writing a series of essays on the role of women in the Christian community. Thus far, he has written two essays in this study. See Dallas Burdette, "The Role of Women in the Great Commission" and "First Timothy: Literalism and Isolationism of Scripture"[ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed May 6, 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WOMEN: THEIR ROLE IN THE CHURCH.

[10] The items listed above are issues surrounding the so-called worship service associated with five rituals to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed way. The Bible does not call the assembly a worship service; this concept has come out of Roman Catholicism. For essays dealing with the current problems within the Churches of Christ over "worship," See Dallas Burdette, "The Coming of God's Kingdom: A Call to Worship," "True Worship," "Congregational Worship and Division," "Sunday Morning Worship—Five Acts," Worship: An Analysis of the Various Greek Words," and "Biblical Worship" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed May 6, 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

[11] The unique expression ("the Lord's Church") is employed by many within the Churches of Christ to distinguish themselves from the so-called denominational world. In other words, no one is a member of the Lord's Church who is not a part of the Churches of Christ. It goes almost without saying that the denominational Church of Christ did not exist when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Schlosskirche in 1517, nor did the Church of Christ exist when pope Urban II led the first Christian crusade in 1095. The church of Christ was in existence, but not the Church of Christ Church that came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement.

[12] Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 210-202.

a Or *darkness, and the darkness has not overcome*

d Or *the Only Begotten*

a Some early manuscripts *If you really have known me, you will know*

f Or *his only begotten Son*

g Or *God~s only begotten Son*

h Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

c Greek *he*

d Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 30.

a Or *Messiah*; also in verses 27, 31, 41 and 42

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

[13] For an examination of the subject of biblical chronology, see Dallas Burdette, "What Is Liberalism" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed May 6, 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under UNITY AND DIVERSITY.

[14] See Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John* in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 646. I am indebted to her insights for her discussion of the predicate added by translators to the absolute egw eimi (see page 634).

[15] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol., 36 (Waco: Texas: Work Books, 1987), 139.

[16] In 8:18, there is an egw eimi statement, but this egw eimi is not absolute; it has a predicate attached to it—"who testifies for myself."

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

[17] Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*., 637.

[18] Ibid., 634.

[19] See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Revised, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 397.

[20] O' Day, *The Gospel of John*, 634.

[21] See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 130.

[22] See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 420.

[23] Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (1934, reprinted (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 553.

a Greek *seed*; also in verse 37

b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

Troubles in the Lives of God's People

Thrust Statement: **God's delay does not mean that He has forsaken you.**

Scripture Reading: **John 11:6-7**

Do you think Christians are free from troubles? Do God's people experience death, as do those outside Christ? Do those who profess faith in Christ undergo privations, as do those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord? Did Paul escape adversity because he was a believer? Are Christians suffering today because of their faith? Do the saints of God go through divorce, as do those outside God's covenant of grace? How many of you have ever experienced financial loss? Has anyone here ever suffered the loss of a loved one in death? Do you feel deserted by God? Have you ever cried out, "Why me Lord?" Are disciples of the Lord promised immunity from trials and tribulations?

Is there ever a delay in God's response to your predicament? Does God still love you even if he allows unpleasant things to happen to you? Can distasteful things work for good to those who love God? These are questions that this message explores through biblical and non-biblical examples in the lives of God's people. Hopefully, these models of faith and courage will strengthen you in your journey of faith. All Christians, to some extent, have troubles. The following stories about suffering in the lives of some of God's people should give His people hope in the face of problems that seem insurmountable. The people of God are not immune to death, divorce, financial problems, family difficulties, and so on.

LAZARUS

The account of Lazarus reveals that even those closest to Jesus still experienced tragedy. The story of Lazarus, as reported by John, details Jesus' delay of love in His response to the news that Lazarus was sick. John writes, "Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where He was two more days.[1] Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea" (**John 11:6-7**).[2] Have you considered the words preceding this information about Lazarus' sickness? Listen to John as he explains

Jesus' relationship to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (**11:5**). Upon learning of Lazarus' sickness, Jesus did not leave immediately nor did He speak a word that brought healing to his body—"he stayed where he was two more days." This delay is truly amazing. If John had said, "Jesus was unable to go to their help for two days," then this word *unable* would have lessened the difficulty of understanding.

One's difficulty of understanding is lessened by the *yet* (**11:6**), which contains a wealth of comfort and good hope. But what is its message? The message is that God is going to use the transpiring events to reveal once more His glory and the glory of His Son. Jesus comments on the sickness of Lazarus by saying, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (**11:4**). Martha and Mary experienced the loss of Lazarus, but God would use his death to glorify Himself and His Son. Jesus, knowing that Lazarus was dead, told His disciples that he was asleep, "but I am going there to wake him up" (**11:11**). Upon His arrival in Bethany, Martha and Mary both expressed their anxieties to the Master: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (**11:21, 32**). Even though they were loved, in a very special sense, by Jesus, still they were not spared from grief; on the other hand, this sadness did not last long because Jesus called forth Lazarus from the grave.

This narrative on the death of Lazarus is a classic example of involvement in which our Lord Jesus intervened on behalf of Martha and Mary. But, on the other hand, there are other cases in the word of God in which God did not protect His people from catastrophe. In spite of the death of Lazarus, neither sister doubted Jesus. How do you react when you suffer hardships such as the pain that Martha and Mary were subjected to? Do you think that your problems are greater than anything other believers have encountered in their life times? Have you ever considered the story of Joseph? How long has it been since you reflected upon Paul's thorn in the flesh? Have you ever studied the persecutions that Paul endured during His ministry for Jesus? With Martha and Mary, one witnesses the delay of love in Jesus' response to their message about the sickness of Lazarus. God's delay does not mean that He has forsaken you.

JOSEPH

The story of Joseph is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. This narrative covers more than a dozen chapters in Genesis and demonstrates that God is actively involved in the lives of His people. Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and became Jacob's favorite. Moses writes about this extraordinary birth: "Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace.' She named him Joseph, and said, 'May the LORD add to me another son'" (**Genesis 30:22-24**). Eventually, his brothers came to hate him and sold him to traders, who also sold him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, in Egypt (**37:1-36**).

Not only was Joseph taken from his father and sold into slavery, but he also ended up in prison as a result of refusing the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife (**39:1-23**). In spite of his blameless behavior, Joseph still ended up in prison. He patiently waited for

someone to help him in his predicament, but to no avail (**39:1—40:23**). Amazingly, one is stopped in his/her tracks as one reflects upon the words of Moses:

> But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did (**39:20-23**).

Finally, help came from one of Pharaoh's servants (cupbearer) that had previously been released from prison and restored to favor with the king. Earlier, Joseph had interpreted a dream of the cupbearer and the baker. In this dream he informed the cupbearer that he would be restored to his earlier position and that the baker would be executed within three days. Following the interpretation of these dreams, Joseph requested that the cupbearer remember him and come to his aid in obtaining his release from prison (**49:1-15**). But the cupbearer did not remember Joseph' request—at least for two years (**41:1**). After two years of imprisonment, Joseph was released from prison and made equal to Pharaoh (**41:39-40; 44:18**). Joseph made plans for the coming famine that God had revealed to him in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (**41:28-40**). Eventually, this famine caused Joseph's father to send his sons to Egypt for food. Ultimately, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers:

> Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! (**45:3-4**).

One cannot help but reflect upon God's delay of love in the troubled life of Joseph. Even in prison, Moses says that God "the LORD was with him" (**39:20**). Again, Moses reinforces God's actions in Joseph's life: "the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (**39:23**). Was Joseph bitter with his brothers and with God for all the misfortunes that he had endured from his brothers and the false accusation from Potiphar's wife? Did he break out in anger against God? How would you have reacted? How do you act in response to ill-timed circumstances in your own life? How did Joseph react? Listen to his conversation with his brothers about their earlier clandestine operation:

> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt (**45:4-8**).

One wonders if Paul did not reflect upon the life of Joseph when he penned the following words: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (**Romans 8:28**). Paul, so it seems, is not saying that everything that happens to an individual is good, but rather, he seems to be saying that out of ill-fated circumstances, God can turn these wretched trials into things beneficial to those who love Him. Paul puts forth a number of questions concerning evil—trouble, hardships, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, the sword—and he desires to know if these regrettable actions can deter us from Christ:

> What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:31-39**).

God's delay or lack of action does not mean that God has forsaken us. Even in the face of troubles, God is still with us.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah began his ministry about 627 BC during the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah (**Jeremiah 1:1-2**). He declared his opposition to false religious practices, wrong social behavior, and foolish government policies. This resistance against the prevailing evil habits in the nation of Israel brought strong hostility to his ministry. As a result of the reaction of the government and the people, he displays a great deal of unhappiness with the community in general and with God's seemingly disregard for his welfare.

Jeremiah began his public ministry when he was about twenty years old (**1:6**). He never married since God told him not to (**16:2**). Apparently, he had few friends (**20:7**). And, if this was not enough trouble, God revealed to him how his own family would abandon him: "Your brothers, your own family—even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you" (**12:6**). Even the people of his own town plotted to kill him:

> I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no

more." But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Therefore this is what the LORD says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, "Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD or you will die by our hands" (**11:19-21**).

Do you have troubles? Are your problems anything in comparison to the sufferings that Jeremiah endured? When one is a prophet of God, this fact, in and of itself, does not relieve one from troubles. Had God forewarned Jeremiah in the initial stage of his calling? Listen to God as he speaks to Jeremiah:

> Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD (**1:17-19**).

This affirmation of God to Jeremiah gave him confidence to do what God wanted him to do. But was Jeremiah "a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land"? Yes he was! But that did not mean than he would not experience trouble. Not only did God tell Jeremiah that the people would fight against him, but God also said, "I am with you and will rescue you." This sounds fair enough, does it not? Well let's hear the rest of the story. Jeremiah found himself beaten up and in the stocks by orders of the priest Pashur (**20:1-2**). Well, what about God's assurance: "I am with you and will rescue you." If you had been in Jeremiah's shoes, how would you have reacted to such treatment? Listen to Jeremiah as he complains to God about this ill treatment:

> O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long (**20:7-8**).

Can you imagine a prophet of God telling God that He deceived him? Do you recall how God informed Jeremiah about his family betraying him? Just before God reveals this devastating news, Jeremiah questions God about justice. In response to Jeremiah's complaint, God questions him about his spiritual strength. God goes right to the heart of the problem:

> "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? (**12:5**)

God is simply saying to Jeremiah, "Jeremiah if you think things are tough now as you race with men on foot, just wait until you have to compete with horses." Again, God wants to know how he will manage in the thickets by the Jordan if he stumbles in a safe country. In other words, God is saying in essence, "Jeremiah, if you think the problems you have right now are tough, then you are in for a shock—you have not seen anything yet."

PAUL

The life of Paul is an enigma to the casual reader of his troubled life. Luke reveals to his readers that Paul, before his conversion to Christianity, had obtained letters to go to Damascus (137 miles NE of Jerusalem) to take as prisoners all—men or women—who belonged to the Way (**Acts 9:1-2**). His objective was to arrest them and take them to Jerusalem. But as he neared the city of Damascus—approximately 137 miles from Jerusalem—the Lord caused a great light to flash around him (**9:3**). During his conversation with the Lord, Jesus told him to go Damascus. In the mean time, God also spoke to Ananias to "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight" (**9:11-12**). Following Ananias' encounter with Paul, Paul was baptized according to the command of Christ as recorded in **Matthew 28:18-20**).

Ananias informs Paul: "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (**Acts 22:14-16**). Paul immediately proclaimed the good news of God to those in Damascus. Luke says: "Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (**9:22**). As a result of his preaching, the Jews conspired to kill him (**9:23**). In fact, things got so bad that Paul's followers "took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall" in order to escape being killed (**9:25**). Even though Paul became a child of God that, in and of itself, did not guarantee the absence of trouble.

Later, Paul returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple (**22:17**).[3] So far so good, so it seems. But trouble for Paul is on the horizon again. Luke says that while Paul was in a trance, the Lord spoke to him: "Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me" (**22:18**). This news fell on Paul's ears in unbelief and bewilderment:

> "Lord," I replied, "these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him" (**22:19-20**).

In spite of Paul's reluctance to leave, the Lord said: "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (**22:21**). Again, one is reminded that God's people are not free from troubles when one reflects upon Paul's prior activities against Christians prior to his conversion to Christ as Lord. Prior to his acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, he went from one synagogue to another in order to imprison and beat those who accepted Jesus as Lord (**22:19**).

Sometime later, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark started on their first missionary trip (**13:1-3, 13**). When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Pisidian Antioch (275 miles NW of Paphos), persecution also broke out against Paul and Barnabas: "But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They

stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (**13:50**). Do you think your troubles are greater than the troubles that the early Christians encountered? When one becomes a child of God, this, in and of itself, does not free one from troubles in the family, from the agony of sickness, nor from the devastation of death. The stories about Paul's missionary journeys are classic examples of how he coped with troubles in his own life.

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Luke records the first missionary journey of Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark in **Acts**, **chapters 13** and **14**. Upon Paul's and Barnabas' arrival in Pisidian Antioch, they preached the good news of God. As a result of emphasis upon Jesus as God's way of forgiveness and justification (**13:38-39**), the Jews "stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (**13:50**). They left Pisidian Antioch and went to Iconium (71 miles SE of Antioch) and proclaimed the good news. Luke says that they spent considerable time there (**14:3**) and spoke "boldly for the Lord, who confirmed by the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (**14:3**). In spite of the wonderful things God accomplished through their ministry, nevertheless, "There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news" (**14:5-7**).

In the city of Lystra (14 miles S of Iconium), they received a great welcome following a miracle that Paul performed (**14:9-11**). The crowds were so enthusiastic that they wanted "to offer sacrifices to them" (**14:13**). But the crowds turned against Paul when some Jews came from Pisidian Antioch (85 miles from Lystra) and won the crowd over (**14:19**). As a result of the persuasion of the Jews from Antioch, Luke informs his readers about the tragic events that transpired: "They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city" (**14:19**).

The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe" (**14:19-20**). Did they give up? No! They left for Derbe (45 miles SE of Lystra) and "preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith (**14:21-22**). How did they view persecution and the work of God in their lives? Listen to Paul as he explains: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (**14:22**). Are your troubles anything in comparison to the hardships that Paul and Barnabas endured?

SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

During Paul's second missionary journeys, one soon discovers tremendous persecutions against Paul and Silas, his fellow-worker (**Acts 16—18**). In fact, things got so bad prior to Paul's arrival in Corinth that God appeared to Paul in a vision at Corinth to give him encouragement: "'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.' So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God" (**Acts 18:9-11**). It appears that Paul had just about reached a breaking point.

He had undergone a beating and imprisonment in Philippi (**16:16-24**). But that persecution was just the beginning.

After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they went to Thessalonica [128 miles SE of Philippi] (**Acts 17**). After arriving in Thessalonica, Paul explained and proved from the Scriptures that Jesus had to suffer and rise from the dead (**17:1-3**). Some were persuaded that Jesus was the Christ. But the Jews were so jealous that they rounded up some bad characters in the marketplace and formed a riot (**17:5**). And as a result of this riot, Jason, who had welcomed Paul and Silas into his house (**17:7**), was dragged, along with some other brothers, before the city officials (**17:6**). Finally, Jason and the other brothers posted bail and they let them go (**17:9**). Paul and Silas could not be found by the mob (**17:5**), and later that night Paul and Silas went to Berea [41 miles SW of Thessalonica] (**17:10**).

THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Luke also informs his readers that the Jews did not stop their actions against Paul: "When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up" (**17:13**). Paul left Berea (approximately 40 miles W of Thessalonica) and went to Athens (200 miles SE of Berea) and waited for Silas and Timothy (**17:15-16**). Finally, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth [40 miles W of Athens] (**18:1**). As stated above, God assured Paul that no one would attack or harm him while in Corinth (**18:10**). He spent about eighteen months in Corinth preaching Jesus (**18:11**).

Following the completion of Paul's third missionary Journey, Paul was arrested and spent the next four years in jail (two in Caesarea and two in Rome—**24:27**; **28:30**). Are your troubles in life anything in comparison to Paul's? In concluding the scenario of Paul's trials and tribulation, it would be helpful to hear from Paul himself the many hardships he endured:

> Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I

was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands (**2 Corinthians 11:23-33**).

CONCLUSION

Today, how would you view such troubles in your own life? As a Christian, would you scream, blame, and reject God if you had to suffer imprisonment because of your faith in Jesus? How would you respond to heartbreaking disaster in your own life? How do you respond to sickness, death, financial loss, divorce, and so on? How do you react to unfortunate circumstances in your own life? Do you view your troubles in the same way Paul viewed his incarceration? How did Paul react? Listen to him as he expresses his views to the Christians in Philippi:

> Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly (**Philippians 1:12-14**).

Have you allowed your troubles to advance the gospel of God? The very thing that makes one think that God has deserted him/her may be the very proof of His love. As stated above, the "yet" (in the story of Lazarus) may give comfort to our hearts when delays and disappointments and sorrows nearly overwhelm us. One cannot say that one can always see the love of God in one's sorrows and troubles and disappointments. Yet, every believer must take it on trust.

Yet it is still a tremendous help to believe that God is there, even if we cannot see that back of every trouble, every trial, every grief, and every loss that God is still there. There is still the "yet" of God's holy and immeasurable love. One should never forget the words of Peter to God's elect that were scattered throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (**1 Peter 1:2**)—"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (**5:7**). Have you done this?

The meaning of Peter's words is that Christians are to commit all their troubles to Him. Even if one loses one's friends, one's health, or one's property, one is still to cast all anxiety on Him because He cares for every individual. The apostle calls it, "all your anxiety." The cares of every Christian is various—personal cares, family cares, cares for the present, cares for the future, cares for yourself, cares for others, and cares for the community of God. The conclusion of Paul's letter to the Philippians is to the point about anxiety. What does Paul say? Listen to Paul as he encourages the proper mind-set for God's children as they face troubles in their own lives:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 4:4-7**).

It is appropriate that this message concludes with the words of Paul to the Christians in Philippi as each reflects upon his/her own tight spots:

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (**Philippians 1:27-30**).

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[1] At this particular time, Jesus was in Bethany, not the Bethany in Judea—two miles south of Jerusalem, but in Perea where John had earlier experienced a successful ministry (**John 10:40-42**). Jesus was approximately twenty-two miles from Bethany in Judea, the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. For a visual geographical location of Bethany in Perea. This Bethany is in Perea to the east of the Jordan River.

[2] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[3] Following Paul's third missionary journey, Paul, upon his arrival in Jerusalem, was arrested. **Chapter 22** of **Acts** is Paul's account of the events that transpired before and after his conversion to Christianity. The episode of Paul in Jerusalem occurred before Paul began his first missionary journey.

Whoever Comes to Me I Will Never Drive Away

Thrust Statement: **God will accept anyone who comes to Him.**

Scripture Reading: **John 6:35-40**

Do you ever feel unworthy of the Gospel of Christ? Do you think that your life is too soiled for Christ to accept you? Will God accept the drunkard, the homosexual, the lesbian, the thief, the murderer, the prostitute, and so on? How do you feel about your own salvation? Do you have hope? Do you understand the love of God? Does God accept the down-and-out? Does God accept sinners? As one reads and rereads the Word of God, one is presented with real people who also felt this same unworthiness of God's grace. One is confronted, almost daily, with the very dregs of society. Yet, in spite of such degradation, one sees the Son of God reaching out to the lost. In fact one can hear the words of the Master as those words sink deep into one's consciousness: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (**Matthew 11:28**).[1]

God deals with all of us, in spite of our idiosyncrasies, or unconventional behavior. The clarion call is: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." To illustrate these truths, this message will utilize three characters in order to point out God's willingness to accept the most egregious sinner—The Samaritan woman, Levi (Matthew) the tax collector, and the woman caught in adultery. I have chosen these three people, especially the two of the women, to show how God crossed traditional barriers to reach out to women as well as to men, especially tax collectors. Also, I relate three stories of how **John 6:37** gave hope to individuals who were in doubt about their salvation—God's acceptance of such unworthy individuals. The first story is about Bishop Butler.

STORY OF BISHOP BUTLER'S FEAR OF DEATH

Every sinner can find hope and comfort in the words of Jesus: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (**John 6:37**). These words give reassurance to the one who is ever conscious of his or her lifestyle or unworthiness. Even though Christians are quite familiar with **John 6:37**, nevertheless Christians have to be reminded of this great statement by Jesus. It is not uncommon for Christians, in the face of death, to frequently forget these powerful words of encouragement. The story is told of Bishop Joseph Butler's (1692-1752) fear of dying, even though he was ordained to the ministry in 1718 and continued in this role until his death in 1752. His life was a life of active service in God's kingdom. Yet, at the end of his life, he fell into uncertainty about his own salvation in the afterlife. As he reminisced about his own life, he felt the pain of his own sinfulness; this consciousness of sin filled him with a terrible concern about his own eternal salvation.

In his final days, a friend sought to comfort him by saying, "You know, sir, that Jesus is a great Savior." "Yes," replied Butler. "I know that He died to save. But how shall I know He died to save me?" "My lord," said the friend, "it is written that him who cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!" (KJV). It is said that Butler's eyes brightened. "I am surprised that, though I have read that Scripture a thousand times, I never felt its virtue until this moment. Now I die happy." This Scripture gives comfort to the dying. This Scripture, too, is for you and for me. It is for everyone who wants eternal life. It is for everyone who is in despair. Regardless as to how "dirty" one's life is or has been, Jesus is still saying, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (**John 6:37**).[2]

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

The Holy Spirit reveals many stories in the life of Jesus that should give everyone tremendous hope. One such account in found in the Gospel of **John, chapter 4**. Everyone knows of this story—the woman of Samaria (**John 4:7**). This story has been a means of grace to countless thousands down through the centuries. This episode is one of the most thrilling stories of soul winning that one can read about in all of Scripture. Many have been led through the door of regeneration and through the gateway of faith with this heart-wrenching narrative of a loose woman and her testimony. As a result of Jesus' love, this woman became a model soul winner. In spite of the fact that Jesus knew the sordid life of this woman, nevertheless, He said, "Will you give me a drink?" (**4:7**). One cannot read this narrative without a consciousness of Jesus' desire to win this woman.

He wanted to gain this soul for eternity. If He had not been anxious to capture this woman for salvation, He would have kept to Himself. Instead of shunning her, He carried on a conversation with tremendous theological implications for the new messianic kingdom that He came to inaugurate. He did not give her the deep-freeze treatment. One should read this story over and over again in order to observe the kindness and love Jesus manifested toward this sinful woman. Is Jesus your pattern in reaching out to the lost and to the saved? How do you react toward individuals who are living in sin as their way of life? How do you act in response to those who profess faith? Are you rude? Are you hostile? Are you short in reply to inquiries about salvation or the congregation you are associated with? Some Christians have the great gift of freezing; they can freeze you with a look or their voice. Some Christians repel

people by their coldness; they are not magnets; they are the very opposite of attraction. Christians should imitate the meekness of Jesus in trying to win souls to Christ and in trying to encourage other Christians to be faithful in their Christian service. The words of Paul to the Corinthians are to the point:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**).

This woman became a great evangelist—the town turned out to see Jesus. But if Jesus had had the frame of mind that many Christians exhibit today, this woman would not have been converted. Jesus certainly went against the traditions of His day, especially talking to women. Not only was this individual a woman, but also she had a bad reputation. One should never associate with sinners according to the Pharisees. In fact, the religious leaders complain to Jesus about His fraternizing with "tax collectors and sinners" (**Luke 5:30**). But Jesus responds to their complaints by saying: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (**5:31-21**). This story of the Samaritan woman is a classic example of Jesus' purpose in coming to this earth. There was nothing stiff and starched about the Savior's attitude toward the down-and-out. One observes aggressiveness in Jesus' dealing with this woman; He did not wait for the woman to address Him, but He addresses her: "Will you give me a drink?" (**John 4:7**). From that introduction, He engages her in an exchange of words in order to make her aware of Himself as the long awaited Messiah.

Jesus gently leads her to talk about things that would lead her to recognition that He Himself is the Christ; He also leads her to a consciousness of her own sin. His conversation let her know that He could lift her out of her sin and make her a soul winner for God. The conversation about water leads Him to tell her about the water that He gives—eternal life (**4:13**). Jesus explains:

> Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (**4:13-14**).

This woman of Samaria requests this water; Jesus responds by telling her to "Go, call your husband and come back" (**4:16**). The woman promptly tells Jesus that she does not have a husband (**4:17**). Immediately, one witnesses the miraculous powers of Jesus that proves that He is the Christ: "You are right when you say you have no husband. [18] The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true" (**4:17-18**). She, like so many individuals today, just lived with her lover without marriage. She knows that this man Jesus must be a prophet (**4:19**). The conversation leads to the subject of worship (**4:19**). This discussion also leads her to say: '"I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us'" (**4:25**). Whereupon, Jesus responds with the first of the "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John: "I who speak to

you am he [εγω ειμι]" (**4:25**). The NIV adds the personal pronoun "he" in order to bring out the concept of what Jesus is saying, "I am the Messiah." But, one must never forget that the phrase is in the absolute (without the predicate nominative "He" or "Messiah") in Greek, no predicate is added.

Jesus does not denigrate her because of her loose living. He offers her eternal life. How does she respond? How have you responded to God's grace when He reached down, as it were, and saved you? This woman immediately becomes a soul winner for Christ. She went back into Jericho and related this story of how Jesus had told her about all she ever did. She asked the question: "Could this be the Christ?" (**4:30**). John says that "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did'" (**4:39**). As a result of her testimony, many left the town and went to hear this man for themselves (**4:30**). After hearing Jesus, John says that the people responded by saying: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (**4:42**). God uses sinners saved by grace to spread the message of salvation through Christ. Are you allowing God to use you? The Samaritan woman was a model soul winner.

The Savior did not begin by saying you are a sinful woman. He did not begin by telling her that He was the Messiah. He simply began the conversation by requesting a drink of water. If we expect to be soul winners for Jesus, we need to break down the barriers before we deal with their sins. This gentle leading leads to her confession of faith in Him. Jesus tells the woman that if she only knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to you, then you would request of Him and He would give you living water (**4:10**). Do you know Jesus? Have you requested from Him the living water? If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, He will give you eternal life. No one's life is too soiled for the Master. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whosoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life" (**Revelation 22:17**).

STORY OF CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT'S CONVERSION

John 6:37 is a Scripture that everyone can claim as his or her own. Regardless as to how sordid one's lifestyle is, one can still cite this verse for hope of eternal life. Just as Jesus accepted the Samaritan woman, so He will accept anyone who comes to Him. This Scripture has brought comfort and hope and encouragement to many individuals down through the centuries. It, too, can bring confidence into your stormy life. The following story is another example of how **John 6:37** interacted with the life of one who was a disillusioned invalid. The story is told of Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871), born in Brighton, England. She was the granddaughter of the evangelical pastor Henry Venn (1725-1797). She was an embittered invalid.

Dr. Cesar Malan (1787-1864), a Swiss minister, sought to help her in her relationship with God. During an evening meal, Charlotte railed against God. Following this event—the family left the room—Dr. Malan stared at her across the table, saying, "You are tired of yourself, aren't you?" "What is your cure?" asked Charlotte. "The faith you are trying to despise." As they talked Charlotte softened. "If I wanted to become a Christian and to share the peace and joy you possess," she asked, "what would I do?" You would give yourself to God as you are now." As a result of

this encounter, she did come to Jesus as she was. She gave her heart to Jesus that day. Later she found **John 6:37** as a special verse for her. Charlotte later wrote a poem that was sold across England in a leaflet that was headlined with **John 6:37**. Underneath was Charlotte's poem, which became the famous invitational hymn: "Just As I Am."[3]

LEVI: MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR

Matthew was a man whom the Jews despised—a tax collector. Matthew, in the writing of his Gospel, gives a brief biographical statement about himself and his call into the ministry of Jesus: "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him (**Matthew 9:9**). Did Jesus choose this man to illustrate that He came to seek and save the lost? Following Matthew's call, Matthew threw a big dinner party in which he invited many of his friends—tax collectors and sinners. One can almost imagine that this must have been a rather motley crowd.

Matthew provides us an insight as to the reaction of the Pharisees: "When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?'" (**9:11**). Jesus did not deny that they were the dregs of society. He goes right to the heart of His mission: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (**9:12-13**). This message reinforces the words of Jesus as reported by John: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (**John 9:37**).

Matthew, in **chapters 8** and **9** of his Gospel, records eight miracles. Yet right in the heart of these miracles, he reports his call to follow Jesus. It seems as if Matthew says, I will tell them about the miracle of the Savior healing a paralytic (**9:1-8**), but I will also tell them about another miracle—my salvation (**9:9-12**). God called him in spite of his occupation. Upon receiving his call from Jesus, he gave up all his gains for wealth in order to follow the Savior of the world. Here was a man who was up to his ears, so to speak, in a business that was associated with oppression and extortion. One can only surmise that this was a miracle equal to the healing of the paralytic.

Many today are walking miracles of salvation. I invite you to sit down and think, not about Matthew, but about yourself. I shall think about a man named Dallas Burdette; you can think about a man named Mickey Brooks; you can think about a woman named Carrol Brooks; you can think about a woman named Tammy Salinas; you can think about a man named Curtis Creel; you can think about a woman named Faith Wilson; you can think about a man named Earl Moore; you can think about a woman named Debra Newton. I ask you today to substitute your name for the name Matthew. Do you not stand in awe that God has reached down to save a wretch like you and me?

If one looks back at the unsavory reputation of Matthew, he does not appear to be a likely candidate for discipleship. It is true that Jesus saw all of Matthew's sins; He saw all of the evil in him. But, on the other hand, Jesus also saw more in Matthew than probably Matthew saw in himself. He saw goodness and faithfulness and usefulness in Matthew. Thus, He reached out in grace to call him into His service. May God help

each of us to sit in wonder at the matchless grace of God as He reaches down to us sinful creatures. Are you hesitating in heeding the call to salvation? Matthew did not hesitate; he followed Jesus immediately. I beg everyone who is here today not to be ashamed of the Master, but rather to introduce Christ into your work place. He who has invited you has also asked you to invite others.

D. L. MOODY'S STORY OF CONVERSION

The following story is a story that most of us could easily identify with. We may not have committed the same sins, but we all know that we, too, have sinned and have fallen short of God's demands. Moody tells the story of an individual that came to him feeling that his life was so messed up that not even God could help him. Have you ever felt that way? Moody's response is worth reflecting upon as he sought to lead this poor sinner to the One who died for him and for us. Moody, in his response, cited **John 6:37**: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." This saying seemed too good to be true. The man could not say yes to these words of Jesus. The man responded, "But brother Moody, I am an alcoholic and a drunkard." Can you identify with this man? In response Moody replied with clear insight, "It does not say, 'Him that comes to me who is not an alcoholic and who is not a drunkard I will not drive him away.'"

The man continued his disbelief about God's invitation by saying, "But brother Moody, I have abandoned my wife and my children." Moody agreed with him, "That is a dreadful thing"; "But, Moody continued, "it does not say,' 'whoever comes to me who has not abandoned his wife and children I will not drive away.'" Again the man argued, "I have stolen and I have been in jail." "Still," said Moody, "It does not say, 'Him that comes to me who has never stolen and who has never been in Jail I will not drive away." Once more, Moody calls attention to **John 6:37**. "It merely says," said Moody, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." After listening to Moody, this man was convinced that God would accept him. This story covers every one of us here today, without exception.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

This is one of the best-known stories in the Gospel of John. One statement stands out, perhaps, more than any other statement in this narrative—"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (**John 8:7**). John tells the story of a woman caught in adultery. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to take action against this sinful woman. It is true that the religious leaders were not so much concerned with this sin as they were in trying to figure out a way to get rid of Jesus (**8:6**). But, as usual, He turned the tide against them. This is a story of forgiveness and passion. It is the story of "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

How would you have reacted to this sordid situation? Would you have said, "How could she"? And immediately the telephone becomes the means of exposing the guilty party—"Did you hear about Mary being caught in adultery." Christians frequently forget the instructions of the Holy Spirit: "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. [2] Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (**Galatians 6:1-2**). Or what about the words Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors" (**Matthew 6:12**). Listen once more to the language of our Lord Jesus: "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (**6:13**). The One who taught this spirit of forgiveness is the same One who said: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (**John 6:37**).

One of the most common faults in life is that we demand standards from others that we do not demand of ourselves. It is the desire of Jesus that pity and compassion and mercy and forgiveness and understanding should be extended to anyone who makes a mistake. The religious leaders knew the excitement of exercising the power to condemn. On the other hand, Jesus knew the joy of exercising the power to forgive. When Jesus had to confront this sinful woman, He did not denounce her. He declined to address her as a worthless and terrible woman, but rather He said: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (**8:10**). John then gives her response: "No one, sir," (**8:11a**).

How did Jesus react to this sinful woman: "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (**8:11b**). Why did the religious leaders leave the presence of Jesus and this sinful woman? Jesus put the monkey on their back, so to speak. Listen to Him as He went for their jugular vein of hypocrisy—"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (**John 8:7**). What would you have done? Again, one hears the words of Jesus ringing like a clarion call: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (**6:37**). Is it any wonder that John begins his Gospel with these breathtaking comments about Jesus: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (**1:17**).

CONCLUSION

My prayer is that God will help us to remember that Jesus came to men and women in love and suffered for humanity so that we could be united with each other and with Him. Are you merciful toward the sinner? Are you kind toward the saint? Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, sets forth the "narrow way": "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (**Matthew 5:7**). This statement is in the indicative, not the imperative mood. In other words, Jesus frequently describes a situation by using the indicative—"Blessed are those who do this." But, on other occasions, Jesus employed the imperative in order to reinforce His teachings. Shortly before His crucifixion, He did give an imperative: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (**John 15:12**).

God wills unity in love. Love for one another can be taken as a test for our love for God. Men and women did not have to become perfect before they could have God's love. In Jesus' day, the religious leaders were uncomfortable with the concept that God loved the Samaritans as much as He loved the Jews, and that He loved the harlots as much as He loved the Pharisees. In that day and time, it was difficult for religious people to understand that God loves the prostitute. It is still challenging for God's people to realize that God loves the down-and-out. It is not easy for us to get the picture that God loves the spiritually sick. But Jesus reminded individuals in His Sermon on the Mount that God demands that His people love their enemies. This Sermon on the Mount with its ethical instruction is the Magna Charta for the kingdom of God. One should pay special attention to the words of Jesus as He strips away the ungodly attitude of not loving the unlovable:

> You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes

his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [46] If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? [48] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (**5:43-48**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

[2] This story is found in Robert J. Morgan, editor, *Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook 2003 Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 14.

[3] I am indebted for this story from *Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook 2003 Edition*, 15.

No Vacancy in the Inn

Thrust Statement: **No vacancy in the inn set the tone for what Jesus experienced during His ministry in reaching out to the nation of Israel.**

Scripture Reading: **Luke 2:7**

INTRODUCTION

"No room in the inn" (**Luke 2:7**, NKJV) sets the tone from the early life of Jesus to His death at Calvary. Even though there was no room for Him in the inn, nevertheless, there was room for Him, in one sense, on Calvary. Although the phrase, "no room in the inn," is frequently understood with negative overtones, the truth of the matter is that this simple phrase simply means that there was "no vacancy"—all rooms were filled. Nevertheless, this phrase, so it appears, is symbolic of the life of Jesus—from the manger to the cross. One can feel the depth of this phrase as one examines the life of Christ. This short terse phrase appears to be a prophecy concerning the rejection of Jesus as the Savior of the world. Did Luke have this in mind? One cannot say for sure, but one does wonder why Luke would have dropped such a pregnant phrase in His account to Theophilus—a phrase weighed down with concentrated meaning throughout Jesus' earthly ministry.

If the inn keeper(s) had known that this One about to be born was the Lord of glory, one cannot help but wonder if he/she would have made room for Him in the inn. It is this same vein of thought that Paul wrote about the crucifixion of the "Lord of glory": "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (**1 Corinthians 2:8**).[1] This birth of Jesus was just the beginning of the unfolding of the "mystery of God" that had been hidden from eternity. Paul calls attention to this birth in his epistle to the churches in the southern part of Galatia: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a

woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:5**).

For Paul, this birth is just the beginning of the "mystery of God" as it unfolds the "unsearchable riches of Christ." Thus, Paul, in writing to the Christians at Ephesus, zeros in on this mystery of God:

> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things (**Ephesians 3:7-9**).

The mystery of God is equivalent to the Gospel of Jesus. Paul, in writing his farewell letter to Timothy, defines his gospel: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel (**2 Timothy 2:8**). "Descended from David" reflects back upon the virgin birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

OVERCROWED HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN

Rejection in Jerusalem

As stated above, this sermon wishes to stress the phrase—"no room in the inn"—in the sense that in this deep expression one finds an ill-fated saying, as it were, that captures the overtone of Jesus' entire life. He sought to gain entrance into the overcrowded hearts of men and women. On one occasion, shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus bemoans the rejection of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (**Matthew 23:37**). Israel had "no room" for Jesus.

He could not find room in their hearts; nevertheless, the search still goes on and the rejection of Him still continues into the present era. Jesus wants to come into your life. He stands at the door of your heart knocking: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (**Revelation 3:20**). In spite of Jesus' invitation many did not accept Jesus' offer of salvation through faith. John, in his prologue to his Gospel, states emphatically that

> [10] He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:10-13**).

Rejection in Nazareth

Many in Israel, especially the religious leaders, did not receive Him. Immediately after His temptation in the wilderness, Luke tells about Jesus' return to Galilee and His teaching in the synagogues and the people praising Him (**Luke 4:14-15**). Then He went specifically to Nazareth where He had been brought up (**4:16**). On one occasion, He read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:17**) on the Sabbath day. This visiting of the synagogues was not an occasional visit, but Luke informs his reader that this was the custom of Jesus (**4:16**). After the reading of **Isaiah 61:1-2**, Jesus informed his listeners: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (**Luke 4:21**). This encounter resulted in a conversation (**4:23-27**) that degenerated into a showdown between the people and Jesus. In fact, this episode caused the people to drive Him out of town with a desire to throw Him down the cliff (**4:28-29**). Again, one can almost hear the phrase, "no room for them in the inn." The undertone to this phrase almost staggers the imagination.

Rejection in Decapolis

Following Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He entered Decapolis and found two demon-possessed men (**Matthew 8:28**). In His encounter with the demons, He allowed them to enter into a herd of pigs (**8:29-32**). Once the town learned of this event, Luke says, "Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region" (**8:34**). How do you react to the rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem? How do you react to the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth? How do you react to the rejection of Jesus in Decapolis? Would there be a different mindset if Jesus were to visit you personally? How does the church today react to Jesus? Does the church want Him? Do you want Him? Are you willing to make room for Jesus in your life? Have you adopted the now famous statement of the innkeepers: "for there was not for them a place in the inn" (**Luke 2:7**)? One can talk about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about the church, and so on; but when you confront Christ, Do you want Christ in your heart? Is there any room for Him in your life? God has not shut you out! He sent His Son to save you. Have you shut God out of your life?

Sword Unsheathed

This birth caused quite a stir in Jerusalem (**Matthew 2:3**). Just as quickly as the news spread about this One born King of the Jews, the sword is unsheathed and follows him to Calvary. Matthew gives the events leading up to the massacre in Bethlehem of all male children under two years of age (**2:16-17**). Not only was there no room in Bethlehem for his parents, but also there was no room for Jesus in the lives of Herod and the religious leaders. Even today, one is aware of nation after nation that refuses Jesus as the savior of the world—no room for Him. The unsheathed sword followed Him to the very end of His earthly ministry. Matthew gives information as to the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane that makes one stand almost in disbelief at the people's reaction to the Son of God who had performed so many, many miracles among them: "While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people" (**Matthew 26:47**). Just prior to this betrayal in the

garden, one gets a glimpse of the psychological turmoil of Jesus' inner being when Matthew gives the words of Jesus to His disciples: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (**26:38**). Can one detect a feeling of loneliness in Jesus?

The Loneliness of Jesus

One may ask the question, where is He wanted? Who wants Him? Where is there room for the Son of God? Are you willing to make room for Jesus in your life? Have you ever felt that feeling of abandonment? Do you sense that feeling of desertion by those whom you love? Have you ever experienced loneliness? When individuals believe that they are a burden to their friends and to themselves, this mood can drive one into a state of depression that can be disastrous to one's well being. Just how does it feel to be lonely? Has anyone ever rejected you to whom you wanted to give your all? John mentions an event that gives some insight as to the psychological feelings that Jesus felt as He witnessed many of His disciples turned from Him and no longer followed Him (**John 6:60-66**).

As these disciples walked away, one gets a glimpse of Jesus as He turns to the Twelve: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (**6:67**). One can almost see the hurt in the eyes of Jesus through the eye of faith. But the Twelve reacted differently. Peter gives his response that has rung a clarion call to all people down through the ages: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. [69] We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (**6:68-69**). Some disciples no longer had any room for Jesus in their lives. Do you have room in your heart for Jesus and His kingdom? Where are your priorities as you reflect upon the kingdom of God? In the very beginning of His ministry, one finds the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount penetrating to the very core of one's soul:

> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. [22] The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. [23] But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! [24] No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (**Matthew 6:19-24**).

Is there room in your heart for the Lord Jesus? Whom do you serve? Do you serve Jesus or the world? Is it any wonder that John, the one who leaned upon Jesus' breast at the Passover, cautioned the disciples of Jesus not to love the world? Listen to John as he instructs his readers:

> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has

and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. [17] The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (**1 John 2:15-17**).

Is Jesus saying to you, "Will you go away also?" Surely there must have been, from a human standpoint, a feeling of loneliness. His neighbors did not want Him. The people of Nazareth did not want Him. The people of Capernaum did not want Him. The people in Jerusalem did not want Him? Do you want Him? If so, then you need to make a commitment to Jesus as Lord of your life. If you follow Jesus, there must be some sacrifice on the part of the one who follows. On one occasion, Jesus encountered an individual who said that he would follow Him. Yet, Jesus' response to this man seems startling: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (**Matthew 8:20**). Again, one must search his/her own heart. Are you willing to forsake all in order to follow Jesus?

The Home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

Even though this message has focused on the negative element of "no room for them in the inn," still one must not forget that many did have room for Jesus in their lives. One cannot read John's account about the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, in the town of Bethlehem, without recognition that these three souls made room for Jesus in their lives. Yes, they received the despised Nazarene. They received the village carpenter into their homes and lives. Luke describes Martha's acceptance of Jesus: "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him" (**Luke 10:38**). While in this home, Martha's sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His every word: "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" (**10:39**). Do you have time to listen to the words of Jesus? Are you willing to invite Him into your heart? Are you willing to invite Him into your home?

Are you like Mary? He wants to bind up your broken heart as he did the hearts of Martha and Mary when their brother Lazarus died. Just as Martha and Mary needed Jesus in their lives, so you need Him. You need to make room for Him in your heart. And, if you make room for Him here, then He will make room for you in Heaven. This message is a plea to everyone to make room for Him in his/her heart. Are you willing to make room for Him? The writer-preacher of Hebrews expresses it forcefully, when he writes:

> See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. [13] But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. [14] We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. [15] As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion" (**Hebrews 3:12-15**).

The Twelve Disciples

Matthew says that He called His twelve disciples and sent them out to preach the good news about the kingdom of God (**Matthew 10:1-10**). They left all to follow Him (**19:27**). Did He promise them a "rose garden" on earth? No! Neither has God promised His believers today a "rose garden," that is to say, a life free from troubles. Listen to Jesus as He warns those who made room for Him in their hearts:

> I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. [17] "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. [18] On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. [19] But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, [20] for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (**10:16-20**).

As one peruses the Book of Matthew, one quickly discovers that many did make room for Him in their lives. Following this appointment of the twelve, one discovers that the followers of Jesus had multiplied as a result of His preaching. Luke says,

> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. [2] He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. [3] Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves (**Luke 10:1-3**).

In addition to this large number that had made room for Jesus in their hearts, one is also impressed with the number of disciples that Jesus met with after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Paul informs the Corinthians that Jesus met with over five hundred of His disciples at one time (**1 Corinthians 15:6**). Where does Jesus stand in your life? Are you committed to Jesus as Lord? Is there a Mary listening to this message? Is there a Mary reading this message? Are you willing to sacrifice the pleasures of life in order to serve Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords? Do you have the mind of Christ? What does this question mean to you? In order to understand more fully the commitment that one should have, perhaps it would be helpful to reflect back upon Jesus before the creation of the world.

GOD BECAME FLESH

For about ten thousand years, God's people knew that the savior of the world would come. This announcement was first made to Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:15**). The prophets prophesied concerning the Messiah. Mothers looked for the birth of the Messiah. No doubt, many mothers wondered as to whether they would be the one through whom the Messiah would be born. Then, it happened (**Luke 2:1-7**). In this account of the birth of Christ, one, once more, is reminded of the humility in His birth—a borrowed cradle (stall). He was born into poverty for your sake and mine. He did not descend into mansions, thrones, or dominions, but rather, He went down into the manger. As one reflects upon the humbleness of this birth of the Son of God, one can hardly fail to reflect upon the words of Paul to the Philippians:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**Philippians 2:1-11**).

As one thinks upon this exhilarating explanation of Christ's humility, it is difficult for one not to reflect upon the words of **Isaiah 53** (740 BC) concerning the coming of this One that emptied Himself, as it were, of equality with God in order to become flesh.

> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? [2]He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not (**Isaiah 53:1-3**).

One witnesses two extremes in the life of Christ—the manger and the cross. Jesus laid aside His glory in order to be identified with humanity. In His birth one sees a borrowed stall, and in His death, one also sees a borrowed tomb. During His life, He wore, as it were, the peasant's garb for the sake of every individual. Paul, in his second correspondence with Corinth, calls attention to Christ's humility for our sake:

> I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. [9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (**2 Corinthians 8:8-9**).

Can you read this passage that graphically details the love of Christ and still refuse Him room in your hearts. He laid aside all His glory; He assumed the form of a servant; He condescended to become man; He allowed Himself to be born in a manger; and He allowed Himself to die, even upon the cross. What does all this have to do with your opening your heart to Christ? Listen to Paul as he writes to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. [12] It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (**Titus 2:11-14**).

CONCLUSION

This message began with the concept of "no vacancy in the inn" for the parents of the One about to be born—the Lord of glory. Even though this phrase is frequently employed, perhaps, in a way that Luke did not intend, nevertheless, one does find some justification for developing this theme in a negative sense—"no room in the inn"—as a jumping off point to launch a message that is relevant to every individual today. There was no room for Joseph and Mary. There was no room for the babe. One cannot say with a degree of certainty that this particular phrase employed by Luke did not carry a prophetic overtone of what lay before Him. Christ's earthly life was one of reception and rejection. This is still true in the twenty-first century.

Hopefully, this examination of this phrase is sufficiently clear to cause everyone to reexamine his/her own life concerning the place of Christ in his/her heart. Is there room for Christ and His Gospel in your life? Is there room for Christ in your day-to-day conversations? Is there room for Christ in your business? How much of the Holy Spirit can one find in your way of life? How much of the Father can one find in your way of life? How much of Christ can one find in your way of life? Do you have room for Christ in your heart? It is not uncommon for believers to have room for everything in their lives except Christ and His kingdom. Are you willing to open your heart to allow the Son of God to come in? Jesus wants room! Have you room for Him? Remember the words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (**Revelation 3:20**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Zeal for God:
Zacchaeus
the Tax Collector

Thrust Statement: **Every Christian is to be zealous for the things of God.**

Scripture Reading: **Luke 19:1-10; Romans 12:11**

Are you thrilled about spiritual things? Are you zealous for the things of God? Do you have an intense yearning for the word of God? Do you hunger for the salvation of lost souls? How often do you meet with God's people on Sunday morning? Do you make every effort to meet with the saints? Do you allow the least obstacle to hinder you in your walk with the Lord? How often do you attend Bible studies? Do you hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God? Are you lukewarm? Do you meditate upon God's word day and night? How often do you read and reflect and study the Holy Scriptures? If your responses to the above questions are negative, then you need to reevaluate your spiritual standing.

SINNER IN JERICHO: ZACCHAEUS THE TAX COLLECTOR

Perhaps everyone here today recalls the story of Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus. This longing was so intense that he was willing to climb a "sycamore-fig tree" (**Luke 19:4**).[1] How many of you have this same kind of craving? Has your faith degenerated into a kind of formality? Or has your faith reached the boiling point? Which? How do you compare with the zeal that Zacchaeus manifested in his determination to see Jesus? Even though Zacchaeus was a very wealthy man, nevertheless, he put forth exertion to see this man. And, as a result of this kind of determination, Jesus says to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (**19:5**). How did he react? Luke informs his readers: "he came down at once and welcomed him gladly" (**19:6**).

One cannot help but wonder how this wealthy tax collector responded in his mind when Jesus called him by name. Surely a commotion of thoughts and feelings must have surged through his heart—Jesus was coming to his house. Zacchaeus knew that Jesus had just read his heart even as Nathanael knew it and confessed it when Jesus uttered that one word to him about his being under the fig tree. Nathanael, too, was filled with bewilderment about how Jesus knew him; he asked Jesus, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (**John 1:48**). As a result of this revelation, Nathanael responded by saying, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (**1:49**).

As one wonders about these two men—one without guile and the other a notorious tax collector—one witnesses that Jesus is not a respecter of persons. He calls all into His service—the respectable and the unrespectable. When Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree, He detected his guileless character; on the other hand, when He saw Zacchaeus in the tree, He perceived his guilty character. Nevertheless, Jesus called him just as he called Nathanael into His service. One witnesses an act of divine grace. The people were astounded that Jesus would go the house of a sinner. Luke captures this interaction on the part of the people: "All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner'" (**Luke 19:7**). Luke concludes this pericope (narrative) by saying: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (**19:10**).

Zacchaeus Boiled With Zeal

Zacchaeus boiled with zeal as a result of his encounter with Jesus. He told the Lord: "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (**19:8**). Jesus acts in response by saying: "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (**19:9-10**). If you had lived in Jericho, would you have written Zacchaeus off? He made his money through dishonest dealings; he loved money; he was the cause of much injustice. Yet God saved him just as He saved you. Since God has saved you, do you boil with zeal for the Lord? Has God made a transformation in your life?

As stated earlier, Jesus knew him and called him by his name. This event must have caught his attention, especially when a stranger calls him by his name—Zacchaeus. When this happens, one's ears perk up and one senses become more alert. From this story about Jesus and Zacchaeus, one surmises that there is one person that the Lord sees—the man or woman who is seeking Him. Are you looking for Jesus? Are you reaching out to Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords? Paul tells the Corinthians: "the man who loves God is known by God" (**1 Corinthians 8:3**). Zeal for God involves a conversion in one's way of life. This change demands repentance. Jesus says, "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (**Luke 13:3**). Listen to the words of Isaiah: Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (**Isaiah 55:6**). Jesus extended an invitation to Zacchaeus and He is also extending an appeal to you: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my

yoke is easy and my burden is light" (**Matthew 11:28-30**). Do you intensively yearn for the Lord?

CHRISTIANS IN ROME: BOILING AND FLAMING FOR CHRIST

Never Lacking in Zeal

Paul admonished the Christians at Rome to "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (**Romans 12:11**). The word "lacking" (ojknhroi,v oknhroi) carries within its meaning the connotation of "slothful" or "lazy." In the classical era it described one who was slow to act. The Book of Proverbs describes the man "lacking" as one who never moves on from the will to the deed: "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work" (**Proverbs 21:25**). This word *lazy* can be further illustrated as Jesus tells the story of a servant who failed to obey and make good use of the opportunity presented to him by his master: "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy (ojknhrev, oknhre) servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest" (**Matthew 25:26-27**).

In the Parable of the Talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**), Jesus speaks of two other servants that were "good and faithful" (**25:21,23**) because they made the most of their opportunity for their master's sake. It is also in this vein that Paul urges the Christians at Rome to express their love of God through various actions. One should consider the following activities of Paul in measuring oneself in his or her zeal for God:

> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. **Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord**. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:9-21**).

Zeal for God

One expresses his zeal to God by sincere love, by hating what is evil, by clinging to what is good, by exercising brotherly love, by living in harmony with one

another, by energetic earnestness, by being on flame for God, and so on. How do you measure up in your zeal? Do you lag in zeal? Are you lazy, inactive, weary, self-satisfied, slow-moving, hesitating, or slowing down in your service to God? The believer cannot approach the Christian life with an easy-going attitude. Did not our Lord say, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:37-40**). Every believer must serve the Lord with attentiveness and zeal and seriousness. He or she must be enthusiastic in his/her service to the Lord.

The author of Hebrews encourages Christians to continue their work and labor of love for God's people. In this exhortation, he reminds them that God will not forget this service toward His people. In this epistle he writes about laziness and diligence:

> Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (**Hebrews 6:9-12**).

Spiritual Fervor

Not only did Paul tell the Christians in Rome to never lack in zeal, but he also charged them to keep their spiritual fervor (**Romans 12:11**). To keep one's spiritual fervor is to be hot, to be set aflame, or to boil for the service of God. Are you boiling and flaming for Christ? Every Christian must have a burning zeal for Christ. Every disciple of Jesus must be aflame for Christ. Christians should have an intense desire to share the good news of God to a dying and lost world. Whatever your spiritual gift is in the Lord, you must fan into flame this gift. Paul reminds Timothy: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (**2 Timothy 1:6-7**). One should never be nervous about the proclamation of God's way of redemption.

One's zeal involves throwing off everything that hinders and every sin that so easily entangles you in your walk with God (**Hebrews 12:1**). It is in this vein that Peter also admonishes God's people about their behavior: "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (**2 Peter 3:14**). Earlier in this same epistle, Peter cautions: "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (**1:10-11**). What were the things that they were to add to their faith? Listen to Peter as he enumerates behavior that every Christian should fan into a burning flame of obedience or zeal for Christ:

> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (**1:5-9**).

As previously stated, the Christian cannot approach life in a lackadaisical easy-going, and slow-moving fashion. He/she must not give in to sluggishness and complacency. No, every child of God must serve the Lord with all care and zeal and seriousness. Everyone must be wholehearted in his service. A close reading of the entire twelfth chapter of Romans reveals the ethical standards Christians are to put into practice in their worship or service to God. All of the characteristics in Romans twelve are to be performed with zeal and spiritual fervor.

SERVE THE LORD WHOLEHEARTELY

In **Romans 12:11**, Paul instructs the Christians at Rome to "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." Zeal and spiritual fervor are to be exercised in one's service to the Lord. The Idea is that Christians should focus upon the Lord in all they do. Believers live to serve Him. God's objective for His elect in Christ is for His people to minister for Him and His kingdom on earth. Paul expresses this concept when he writes: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (**Colossians 3:23-24**).

Moses also calls attention to the necessity of serving the Lord with one's whole heart:

> And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? (**Deuteronomy 10:12-13**)

Jesus cites this passage from Moses in Matthew **22:27-30** in his response to a Pharisee who wanted to know about the greatest commandment in the Law. Whenever Christianity is taken up, it must be taken up with zeal. Today, there appears to be fewer and fewer people with a sense of service and responsibility for the Lord's work. If Christians could ever grasp that service to God is worship, then this concept would revolutionize the current outlook of so many Christians. The author of Hebrews writes: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (**Hebrews 12:28-29**).

How does one "worship God acceptably" with "reverence and awe"? How does one serve God with zeal and spiritual fervor? An answer may be found in **Romans 12**. This chapter begins with the following words about your "spiritual act of worship":

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Paul seeks to bring to the attention of his readers that true worship deals with the horizontal as well as the vertical. God is concerned about how his children relate to one another.

CONCLUSION

Zeal is not frenzy excitement without purpose. It is not just emotional passion, but rather, it is zeal that issues in deeds performed to God's glory. Biblical zeal is an intense desire to serve the God that sent His Son into the world to save those who believe in Him. Because of God's grace, individuals should respond with zeal in behavior that is pleasing and acceptable to God. It is this kind of mind-set that Paul tells Titus to teach:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:11-15**).

Are you zealous for God? Are you boiling with spiritual flames for Christ? Or are you lacking in zeal? Which? May God help each believer to recapture his/her first love. Are you like Zacchaeus? Are you really committed to Him who is the savior of the world? Do you read His word? Do you study His word? Do you meet with the saints on Sunday? Do you meet with the saints on Wednesday evenings for special studies? Are you like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen? Are you denying ungodliness and worldly passions? Are you living self-controlled and upright and godly lives? Are you truly waiting for the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ? Are you on flame for God?

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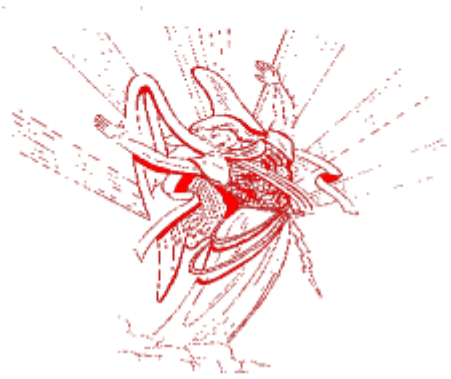
[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Are You the One Who Was to Come?



Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the One who was to come.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 11:1-6**

As Christians prepare to celebrate Christmas, this remembrance should be a time in which believers appropriate the wonder, awe, and mystery of the Incarnation. The celebration of Christmas acts as a spiritual wakeup call for reflection once more upon God's action for the rescue of lost humanity, which action began before He created the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). For centuries, many Christians have observed the season of Advent—the four Sundays proceeding Christmas Day—as a time to re-orient one's mind toward that Incarnation Event which brought to a climax the promises God made to Abraham when he was seventy-five years old (**Genesis 12:4**). From the time of Abraham (2166—1991 BC) to Christ, one sees a span of two thousand years of history. With the coming of Christ, one witnesses the Christ Event (God becoming flesh—**John 1:14**) as changing the world.

Even before God revealed Himself in the Christ Event, God did not leave Himself without witness of His intent to bring about the salvation of all nations. Just a casual reading of the Old Testament writings, beginning with the Book of Genesis, reveals His love and purpose to redeem all humanity in and through Jesus Christ (**Genesis 3:15**). Even before the birth of the Son of God in Bethlehem, God communicated to men and women through history, prophecy, and Scripture. If one regards the season of Advent as only a time for exchanging gifts and the exhilaration of excitement from festivities, one has missed the true richness of this season, namely, the coming of the Christ Event. This season of Advent should be a time for every believer to reflect upon the implications of Christ's coming.

Advent commemorates the coming of Christ as God Incarnate. Advent celebrates the "One who was to come" as foretold by the prophets (see **Isaiah 52:13—53:1-12**; **Zechariah 3:1-9; Malachi 3:1**). John the Baptist's question to Jesus should ring loud and clear in the hearts of men and women. What was the question?

Listen to John as he asked: "Are you the One who was to come?" This inquiry has infiltrated the hearts of men and women down through the ages. Is Jesus the One predicted by the prophets? The writings of the New Testament are a response to this probing question of John the Immerser, commonly known as John the Baptist. Following the arrest of John the Baptist, one can feel the despair of John as he rethinks his own role as the forerunner of Jesus as foretold by the prophets. If Jesus is the One, why am I in jail?

Even though John the Baptist had doubts, nevertheless, one is conscious that the Twelve, too, did not understand the full import of the events about to transpire as the ministry of Jesus came to a close on Calvary—the ultimate climax of the Christ Event. A classic example of failure to comprehend the mission of Jesus is Peter's rejection of Jesus' words to His disciples: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**Matthew 16:21**).[1] At this saying, Peter took our Lord aside and rebuked Him for His remarks. Matthew preserves Peter's response this way: "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'" (**16:22**). Prior to this encounter, Jesus had just asked His disciples as to what the people thought of Him. They replied by saying: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (**16:14**). Following their answer about Jesus' identity, Jesus wanted to know what the Twelve thought about His identity. Peter immediately responds by saying: "You are the Christ,[a] the Son of the living God" (**16:16**).

John the Baptist's question alerts every believer to a consciousness that the Jews expected the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah to rescue humanity. The air, so to speak, was full of excitement about the fulfillment of the long-promised Messiah. Even though this isolated study of John's question cannot explore all of the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, this study will explore the "Branch" passages in order to set the tone for John's inquiry concerning the role of Jesus in the ongoing drama of redemption. The third chapter of Zechariah is an excellent place to begin. Zechariah (520 BC) spoke of the coming Branch as the One who would remove the sin of the land in a single day. Listen to him as he writes:

> 'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. 9 See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes[c] on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.' (**Zechariah 3:8-9**)

This third chapter begins with Joshua the high priest (He was symbolic of things to come.) standing before the angel of the Lord with Satan at His right hand to accuse him (**3:1**). This priest was "dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel" (**3:3**). Even though this priest fell short of God's glory, nevertheless, God snatched this "burning stick from the fire" (**3:2**). The angel then announced that the Lord had taken away his sin and put rich garments on him (**3:4**). As stated above

(**3:8-9**), one observes that "the Branch" is none other than the One that John inquired about. John wanted to know if Jesus is the One that Zechariah wrote about—the One who would "remove the sin of this land in a single day" (**3:9**).

No doubt, Zachariah reflected upon the words of Isaiah (739 BC), who two hundred years earlier, had also spoken of "the Branch" (**Isaiah 4:2**). Prior to this statement by Isaiah, he also predicted the coming of the Messiah during the last days of the nation of Israel, which nation was destroyed in AD 70. In other words the "scepter" (political power) departed Judah in AD 70, which prophecy Jacob foretold to Judah as recorded in **Genesis 49:10**. For example, Jacob told Judah: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs[c] and the obedience of the nations is his" (**49:10**). "Until he comes to whom it belongs" is none other than the Christ, the promised One. The NIV translates "Shiloh" as "until he comes to whom it belongs." Just a casual reading of **Chapters 2—3 of Isaiah** reveals that God reiterates His promise to Israel as recorded by Moses in **Deuteronomy 32**, which is commonly known as the "The Song of Moses." This Chapter describes the events that climaxed the down-fall of Israel in AD 70.

It is to this event that Isaiah relates to the coming of the "Branch" in chapter four. Listen to him as he describes the events that will occur "in that day" (**4:2**):

> In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. [3] Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. [4] The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit[a] of judgment and a spirit[b] of fire. (**4:2-4**)

Approximately one hundred years later, Jeremiah (627 BC) also spoke of the "Branch" to come. Jeremiah explains:

> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David[a] a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. [6]In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness. (**Jeremiah 23:5-6**)

One thing that stands out in addition to "a righteous Branch" is His name, "The LORD Our Righteousness." Paul, over six hundred years later, speaks of this prophecy as having its fulfillment in the Christ Event. Listen to him as he writes about God's wisdom in this scheme of redemption: "It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

In other words, God made Jesus our Righteousness, our Holiness, and our Redemption. This is the reason that Jeremiah spoke of His name as "The LORD Our Righteousness." One is conscious of "the Branch" as the One who would do away with sin in a single day. Remember that Isaiah (739 BC), Jeremiah (627 BC), and Zechariah

(520 BC) all prophesied concerning the coming One of whom John desired to know if He was the One to come. During the time of Zachariah, God raised up another prophet, Haggai (520 BC) who also prophesied of the coming Messiah. Pay attention to Him as he writes: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. [7] I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty" (**Haggai 2:6-7**). This shaking of all nations occurred during the final days of Judah. The "desired of all nations" came before this final shaking of the "heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land." Daniel (605 BC), too, spoke of the coming of the Anointed One. Daniel writes

> Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree[d] to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One,[e] the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. [26] After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.[f] The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. [27] He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.'[g] In the middle of the 'seven'[h] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.[ii]" (**Daniel 9:25-27**)

Isaiah 53, **Psalm 22**, and **Daniel 9** address the spectacle of Gethsemane and Calvary. God's wrath was poured out in all its fierceness upon His righteous Servant—His Anointed One. Isaiah wrote about this Servant:

> Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. [2]He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. [3]A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; [4]he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. (**Isaiah 42:1-4**)

Prior to this prophecy, Isaiah also foretold the coming of John the Baptist. Listen to him as he writes about the one who would prepare the way for the coming of God's Anointed One:

> A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD[a]; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.[b]–[4]Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. [5]And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (**40:3-4**)

Matthew understood this prophecy as Messianic in overtone. He explains the prophecy of Isaiah this way:

> In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea [2] and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." [3] This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "[a] (**Matthew 3:1-3**)

In the eleventh chapter of the Book of Matthew, he records the now famous question of John the Baptist:

> After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.[a] [2] When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples [3] to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (**11:1-3**)

Once again, the season of Advent celebrates a fact, not a theory. The Incarnation is not myth. Both the Incarnation and the supreme Christ Event upon Calvary are not myths, but rather they are historically attested facts. Peter, in his second epistle, wrote to those who had accepted the Incarnation and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (**2 Peter 1:16**). Surely, Peter must have reflected upon the Mount of Transfiguration experience as still vivid in his own life as he recalled seeing Jesus in His glory (**Matthew 17:1-8**). As one reflects back upon God becoming flesh, one cannot help but think about the shepherds who received notice of this happening from "an angel of the Lord." Luke, a co-laborer of Paul, gathered information about this birth and recorded this information for Theophilus (**Luke 1:1-4**). Luke writes about the circumstances surrounding this birth of the Son of God:

> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ[a] the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." [13] Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (**Luke 2:8-14**)

This "baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" is none other than "Christ the Lord" promised to Adam and Eve, Abraham (Abraham 2166—1991 BC), Isaac (2066—1886 BC), Jacob (2006—1859 BC), Moses (1526—1406 BC), David (1010-930 BC, forty-year reign), and all the prophets. The foundation of Christianity is Christ. As one recalls the events recorded in the Old and New Testament writings, one is conscious that Christianity sprang out of history. It is not dead history, but it is a living and spiritual history. Christianity must be built upon the complete life of Christ, which life includes His Birth (first coming), His Death, His Burial, His Resurrection, and His

second coming in judgment on the apostate nation of Israel for its rejection of Him as the promised Messiah and Savior of the world.

One stands in awe and wonder as one contemplates the love of God Who sent His Son into the world for the sins of lost humanity (**John 3:16-18**). The One who controls the heavenly host came to earth as a babe. Isaiah, seven hundred years before God became flesh, foretold this event of the birth of the Christ. He, through the Holy Spirit, writes: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you[c] a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and[d] will call him Immanuel[e]" (**Isaiah 7:14**). Once more, he foresees this coming of the Christ: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,[b] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (**9:6**). One cannot read this prediction without a consciousness that "a child is born" and "a son is given." Advent celebrates the Christ Who came to "save his people from their sins" (**Matthew 1:21**). Toward the end of Paul's ministry, he wrote to Timothy concerning the birth of the Christ: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He[c] appeared in a body,[d] was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (**1 Timothy 3:16**).

One of Paul's earliest epistles focuses upon the very core of the Christian Gospel—the coming of Jesus in bodily form. He writes to the churches in the province of Galatia the following words: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). In this same epistle, he defends the Gospel he proclaimed to them on his first missionary journey. Listen to him as he reminds them of the Gospel he made known: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. [12] I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (**1:11-12**). Paul, unlike the Twelve, had not known the historic Jesus, as far as is known, during Jesus' earthly ministry. He had not listened to the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5—7**); he had not witnessed the feeding of the five thousand (**Mark 6:30-44**); He had not communed with Jesus in the final Passover meal as the Twelve (**Luke 22:13-22**); he had not stood sorrowing before Calvary's Cross and later rushed breathless into the empty tomb on Sunday morning (**Luke 24:1-12**). Paul had not experienced the events that the Twelve and many others had experienced concerning the Christ. To Paul, these past events did not belong to his personal experiences. Nevertheless, Christ became real and present in his life through a direct encounter with the risen Christ.

Once Paul came across the living Christ, he made Christianity his own affair. In his coming to Christ, he died to himself (**2 Corinthians 11:23-29; Philippians 1:21**). As one reflects upon the Incarnation, this contemplation should call forth a life of worship. In Jesus, one witnesses His human life as an activity of God in time and space; one observes Jesus dealing with the last enemy of humanity, namely death. With the coming of Jesus, one witnesses Jesus bringing in the New Age, that is, the life of the eternal world. Without the Incarnation, there would be no real uniqueness in Jesus Christ and no real redemption. The question asked by John, "Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" is still relevant today. The miraculous powers of Jesus should convince anyone who truly seeks an answer to this inquiry. Listen to Jesus' reply: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: [5]

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy[b] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (**Matthew 11:4-5**). Jesus offers redemption. With the coming of Jesus in the flesh, one witnesses a word-from-the-beyond for the redemption of men and women, which redemption is mediated through the events of history.

Christianity is built upon the historical facts surrounding the coming and ministry of Jesus. Christianity is not based on one's theological or ethical views, but rather it is based on the person of Jesus. John, one of the Apostles, writes with conciseness when he pens the following words:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it. [6] There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. [7] He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. [8] He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. [9] The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.[b] [10] He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— [13] children born not of natural descent,[c] nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. [14] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' " [16] From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only,[e] [f] who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (**John 1:1-14**)

God the Father is beyond one's ability to see and to know; on the other hand, one can know the Father through Jesus who makes Him known. With the coming of Christ, one now has history. Remember, Jesus asked His disciples: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (**Matthew 16:13**). Jesus is a historical person; He declared Himself to be the One the prophets foretold. The critical question still is: Who is Jesus? This question is the critical issue and the true starting point in one's investigation of Christianity. This season of Advent is a wake-up call to believers to reevaluate their concept of Christianity. Unfortunately, Christendom is full of Christianities, that is to say, the world is full of denominations. To the shame of God's people, far too many believers fail to proclaim Jesus as the center of gravity of Christianity.

For many saints, Jesus is no longer the glue, so to speak, that binds His people together, but rather it is now traditions. The church has forgotten its purpose—preaching Jesus as God's way of salvation. The church today is constantly in danger of being a slave to its historical past and, at the same time, cemented to quotations from the church fathers of their heritage, which traditions are equated with the Word of God itself. These pronouncements become the final word of truth, not Jesus. Christianity today is bound up with various views, especially ecclesiastical rites. Christians will exclude one another from their local fellowships. He who believes not the traditions will be damned. Love is no longer a factor in fellowship. One should never forget that Jesus did not come to establish a system of theology, but rather He brought a system of salvation based on faith in His finished work upon the Cross (**John 19:30**). Jesus, as it were, pointed to His own person. Do you want eternal life? Remember, Christians know the One who is the keeper of the keys of the grave. The Incarnation is a part of the process of the Divine life.

As one reflects upon the coming of Christ, one is immediately conscious that sin involves one coming short of God's glory. Since sin cuts one off from the life of God, one must accept Jesus as God's Atonement for the sins of humanity. The Incarnation was necessary in order that there might be Atonement for sinners. It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Christians in Rome:

> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (**Romans 3:25-26**)

Have you responded to the call of God? Do you want eternal life? One ought never to forget that God removed the barriers holding one back from salvation. With the coming of Christ, God removed the barricade holding men and women from salvation. Jesus is the window through whom one sees God. Jesus calls attention to this truth as he responds to a question by one of His Apostles. In this scenario, John reports Philip's question and Jesus' response: "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' [9] Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (**John 14:8-9**). Again, one stands in awe of God's grace as one contemplates the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the Divine and merciful answer to one's falling away from God. In Jesus, the world of eternity is present in His person.

Since the past belongs to each individual, one is no longer a blank page. Everyone has a history of sin in his or her life. Paul writes with insight as he cites the Old Testament writings:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are

justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (**Romans 3:21-24**)

One now has a history—a history of sin and rebellion. The biblical doctrine of the Incarnation cannot be understood apart from God's holiness. In the Incarnation one witnesses Divine wrath as well as Divine righteousness. Without Jesus, every individual is stripped absolutely naked in God's presence. In the Incarnation, God breaks through His wrath against sin. In the Incarnation, one sees the self-movement of God toward men and women, which movement is the theme of God's written Word. In the Incarnate Word, God comes to every individual. The Bible, from beginning to end, is the story of God breaking into human life. The coming of God's kingdom, in and through Jesus, challenges one's lovelessness and hardness toward others. How do you answer John's question? It is only in Jesus that Satan is silenced on the ground of God's choice, namely, Jesus. Is it any wonder that Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, soars into the heights of heaven, as it were, as he seeks to capture the wonder of it all? Listen to him as he expresses his joy in knowing Jesus:

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (**Philippians 3:7-11**)

Do you feel this way about the One whom John inquired about? Have you accepted Him as the Savior of the world? Are you in fellowship with Him and the Father? Do you know the answer to John the Baptist' question about Jesus' identity? Another John, one of the Twelve, reflects upon this One called the Christ:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. [2] The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. [3] We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. [4] We write this to make our[a] joy complete. (**1 John 1:1-4**)

But last of all, one should listen in on the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus as He explains to him about His ministry.

> No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.[d] [14] Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, [15] that everyone who believes in him

may have eternal life.[e] 16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.[g] 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”[h] (**John 3:13-21**)

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[a] Or *Messiah*; also in verse 20

[c] Or *facets*

[c] Or *until Shiloh comes*; or *until he comes to whom tribute belongs*

[a] Or *the Spirit*

[b] Or *the Spirit*

[a] Or *up from David’s line*

[b] Jer. 9:24

[d] Or *word*

[e] Or *an anointed one*; also in verse 26

[f] Or *off and will have no one*; or *off, but not for himself*

[g] Or *‘week’*

[h] Or *‘week’*

[i] Or *it*

[j] Or *And one who causes desolation will come upon the pinnacle of the abominable temple, until the end that is decreed is poured out on the desolated city*

[a] Or *A voice of one calling in the desert: / “Prepare the way for the LORD*

[b] Hebrew; Septuagint *make straight the paths of our God*

[a] Isaiah 40:3

[a] Greek *in their towns*

[a] Or *Messiah.* "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One"; also in verse 26.

[c] The Hebrew is plural.

[d] Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls *and he* or *and they*

[e] *Immanuel* means *God with us.*

[b] Or *Wonderful, Counselor*

[c] Some manuscripts *God*

[d] Or *in the flesh*

[b] The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

[a] Or *darkness, and the darkness has not overcome*

[b] Or *This was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world*

[c] Greek *of bloods*

[d] Or *the Only Begotten*

[e] Or *the Only Begotten*

[f] Some manuscripts *but the only* (or *only begotten*) *Son*

[a] 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[a] Some manuscripts *your*

[d] Some manuscripts *Man, who is in heaven*

[e] Or *believes may have eternal life in him*

[f] Or *his only begotten Son*

[g] Or *God's only begotten Son*

[h] Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

Blood of the New Covenant

Thrust statement: **Christ poured out His blood for the forgiveness of sins**.

Scripture reading: **Matthew 26:28**; **Luke 22:20**

INTRODUCTION

Many Christians assemble on a weekly basis to celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Christians are reminded of the blood of Christ "poured out" for the "forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**).[1] This participation in the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine is an act of faith on the part of the participants. In the Lord's Supper, one witnesses what the gospel of God is all about. This activity of eating and drinking is an affirmation that believers are to go forth to spread the message of salvation that is "in" and "through" Jesus Christ.

As one drinks the Cup of Blessing, one demonstrates his/her utter dependence upon God. In the Lord's Supper, one is ever conscious of the words of Jesus: "I am with you always" (**28:20**). All down the ages, the Lord's Supper is a constant reminder of the blood of Christ "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**26:28**). In the Lord's Supper, God transformed the meaning of sacrifice, because it is God who offers the sacrifice for the sins of the world. (**Acts 2:23**). This sacrifice even puzzled the angelic host (**1 Peter 1:10-12**). Is it any wonder that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the throne singing: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God" (**Revelation 5:9**).

NEW COVENANT AND HIS BLOOD

Almost two thousand years ago, Jesus announced a startling statement concerning the "new covenant" to His chosen twelve during His final Passover meal. The Jews were aware of the fact that Jeremiah had prophesied concerning the future establishment of a new agreement between God and Israel (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). But Jesus, on this occasion, lets His disciple know that this prophecy is now having its fulfillment in the pouring out of His blood on Calvary. Surely, the disciples reflected back upon the words that Jeremiah had prophesied concerning the new covenant 600 years earlier. Jesus, as He took the third cup (Cup of Blessing) to represent His own blood, states empathically that the fruit of the vine (wine) represents His blood—"This is my blood of the covenant" (**Matthew 26:28**).

This clause is pregnant and rich with historical background and meaning. An understanding of Old Testament sacrifices is indispensable to a proper grasp of this phrase. It is through the blood of the covenant that Jesus is able to accomplish for humanity that which individuals cannot accomplish for themselves; namely, eternal redemption. Is it any wonder that Christians still sing, There Is Power in the Blood? Deliverance from condemnation is brought about through the blood of the Son of God. Paul sets forth the power of the blood in his epistle to the Ephesians:

> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. [9] And he [b] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**Ephesians 1:7-10**).

Redemption includes everything God does for the sinner. In salvation two things stand out prominently in the mind of every believer; namely, the forgiveness of sins and redemption of the body from the grave. Each believer is an illustration of the power of the blood of Christ. It is through the virtue of the blood that God raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. It is through the blood of Christ that Christians are raised from the dead. The Hebrew writer forcefully anchored this truth in the hearts of the believers:

> Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, [21] Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen. [2]

There is power in the blood! The blood makes one complete. The blood enables everyone to every good work. For all who believe in Jesus as God's Messiah, the blood opens the way to heaven, the blood opens the grave. In addition to these helps and benefits, the blood of Jesus destroys the power of death, the power of Satan, and the power of Hell. The author of Hebrews artfully captures the essence of Christ's blood when he writes: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (**Hebrews 9:12**). His blood is the answer to man's redemption. Once

more, the Holy Spirit, through this same writer, also gives a prominent place to the blood:

> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (**12:22-24**).

It is the blood of Jesus that keeps heaven open for sinners and sends the spiritual blessings from heaven upon sinful man. The throne of grace owes its existence to the precious blood of the Lamb of God. Christians must never forget that redemption is through the blood of God's Anointed One. Peter expresses it this way:

> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

As long as heaven lasts, the praises of the blood will sound forth from heaven itself. John writes: "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation'" (**Revelation 5:9**).

FORGIVENESS IS THE SUBJECT OF HEAVEN

Forgiveness is the subject of heaven. Forgiveness is the subject of earth. Forgiveness is the subject of the church. Forgiveness is the subject of both the Old and New Testament writings. Forgiveness is not just a new covenant concept. The Old Testament Scriptures also abound with illustrations setting forth the utter destruction of sin, God's forgiveness, and rejoicing. The blood of Jesus flowed, as it were, backwards and forwards in man's redemption. Forgiveness is something to sing about in heaven and on earth. God reminds Israel of His forgiveness:

> I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you." [23] Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel (**Isaiah 44:22-23**).

Once more, Isaiah aptly remarks:

> You have put all my sins behind your back (**38:17**).

Micah, too, addresses the forgiveness of sins in very glowing terms:

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (**Micah 7:19**).

It is in this same vein that God discloses to Jeremiah His prophet the forgiveness of sins:

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me (**Jeremiah 33:8**).

God Remembers Sin No More

Again, God in revealing to Jeremiah the coming of a new covenant announces that sin would be done away with once and for all:

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. [32] It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to[e] them,[f]" declares the LORD. [33] "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [34] No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (**31:31-34**).

This forgiveness of sins is what Paul details in the Book of Romans. Jeremiah tells the "fact," but Paul details the "how." As Paul writes about this matchless love, this unfathomable mercy, this perfect holiness of God, one must stand in awe. In **Romans 3: 23-26**, Paul burst forth with rapturous language in describing the method God employs to justify man and yet at the same time exonerate His holiness in His actions.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely (dwreaVn, dwreaVn) by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (iJlasthvrion, Jilasthvrion),[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:22-26**).

This word "freely" (**Romans 3:24**) is also translated (NIV) "without reason" in **John 15:25**: "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason (dwreaVn).'" The KJV reads: "But [this] [happened] that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause (dwreaVn).'" Since God is holy, God has to deal with sin in a way that His holiness is not

questioned. God's righteous wrath against sin is an outward manifestation of His holiness. God cannot allow rebellion to go unpunished. Justice demands retribution. Thus, God devises a way to demonstrate His holiness, and yet at the same time justify sinful man. God's solution is "propitiation (iJlasthvrion, Jilasthvrion) by His blood, through faith" (**Romans 3:25**).

JESUS IS GOD'S MERCY SEAT

In the Hebrew Old Testament, the Jilasthvrion is called tr\P)K^ (k^pp)r#t, "mercy seat," "throne of mercy," "atonement").[3] This word refers to the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony where the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement (**Numbers 7:89**). Also, the author of **Hebrews** speaks of the covering on the Ark of the Covenant as a "mercy Seat" (KJV) or "atonement cover" (NIV). He writes:

> Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, [4] which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. [5] Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover (iJlasthvrion). [a] But we cannot discuss these things in detail now (**Hebrews 9:3-5**).

Jesus, in the words of Paul, is God's "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" (iJlasthvrion) [**Romans 3:25**] for sinful man. In other words, Christ is the site at which atonement takes place. In the Old Testament the atonement was looked upon by God alone, but in the New Testament the atonement is open for all to see, for the entire universe. John also speaks of Jesus as a propitiation: "He is the atoning sacrifice (ιΣλασμοψ, Jilasmos, "propitiation") for our sins, and not only for ours but also for [b] the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:2**).

This emancipation from God's righteous wrath, this freedom from the dominion of sin, this deliverance from the curse of law, and this redemption from condemnation is so complete and so perfect that the sinner is looked upon as absolutely justified and righteous before God. Since Jesus is our "wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption," then, writes Paul, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord," (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). The law is now fulfilled in us since we are in Christ (**Romans 8:3-5**).

Complete Forgiveness in and Through Jesus

It is to this view of complete forgiveness of sins that the penman of Hebrews writes that there is nothing to prevent man approaching the throne of grace with the greatest of freedom; he says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (**Hebrews 4:16**). How is this access accomplished? Again, the same author tells us that it is through the blood. He senses the glory of the blood of Christ when he writes:

> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, [20] by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (**10:19-22**).

One's right to draw near is affirmed by the blood of Jesus; He is the High Priest. Since every believer is a priest of God redeemed by the blood, the Holy Spirit encourages all believers to approach God's throne of grace. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus rolls back the curtain of heaven and, through John, declares with transported joy: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, [6] and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (**Revelation 1:5b-6**).

CONCLUSION

There is power in the blood of Christ. The heavenly host sings about the blood of Christ. It is through the shed blood of Jesus that one experiences the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's Supper is a constant reminder of God's new agreement with humanity brought about through the pouring out of the blood of Jesus. God says in essence, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (**Exodus 12:13**). Yes, when God sees the blood of Christ, He no longer remembers the sins of individuals that are covered by the blood of His Son. Has your robe been washed in the blood of the Lamb? When one of the elders asked John to identify the ones he saw in white robes, He answered, "Sir, you know" (**Revelation 7:14**). Immediately John heard the words: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (**7:14**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] *King James Version.* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

[3] Twenty-two times in the Septuagint, Jilasthvrion translates the Hebrew k^pp) r#t, the "mercy seat"; i.e., the golden lid of the ark of the covenant.

Christ's Coming: Fulfillment of Prophecy

By Dallas Burdette: February 20, 1998

Thrust Statement: God guides the history of Israel.

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:44-49; Matthew 1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 27:9-10

As one reads the book of Matthew, one discovers that Matthew speaks of the Old Testament having its fulfillment in Jesus. Even though all the Gospel writers cite from the Old Testament, Matthew includes nine additional proof texts to drive home this basic theme—Jesus is the Old Testament prediction of the Messiah. These citations are a powerful testimony to the origin of Scripture and its accuracy even in the smallest details. With Matthew, there is a clear view of the unity of revelation. There is unity, because God is its author. It is in this same vein that Peter writes:

> And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:19-21**).

Since God guides the whole of history; this history has reached its culmination in the birth of Jesus the Messiah. Matthew stresses this continuity between the Old Testament and the events that transpired with the coming of Jesus. In other words, the birth of Jesus is a part of God's plan for the redemption of sinful humanity. Jesus is God's answer to man's dilemma. One sees divine guidance in Matthew's approach to the birth of Jesus announced by "an angel of the Lord" (**Matthew 1:20**). One

can safely say that Scripture does not belong to the past, it is the Word of the living God. For this reason, Paul could tell Timothy to

> continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (**2 Timothy 3:14-17**).

The coming of Christ was not an afterthought on the part of God. Paul says, "he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (**Ephesians 1:4-6**). Even in the Garden of Eden, God foretold of the coming of the Messiah (**Genesis 3:15**). The Old Testament is packed with numerous prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus. Matthew calls attention to many of these prophecies in his Gospel. The prophets wrote, even though they may not have understand all that they penned, that the ultimate fulfillment of their sayings would find fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah. Peter, in his first epistle, writes to God's elect about this lack of clarity in the minds of the prophets:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. **It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.** Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

The apostles were now, according to Peter, making known the things that the prophets had previously written about. Prior to the resurrection, the apostles themselves still did not understand the things Jesus discussed with them during His earthly ministry. But Matthew is writing about these prophecies many years after Jesus gave them specific instructions about the things the prophets had written about Him. In fact, Luke, a companion of Paul, informs Theophilus (**Luke 1:3**) that after the resurrection of Jesus that He explained to his disciples the messianic meanings contained in the prophets:

> "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-49**).

With this background in mind, then, one should be able to understand more clearly Matthew's insights concerning the proper interpretation or application of the prophecies he cites about the life of

Christ. One ought not to forget that Matthew, in his interpretation of the prophets, relied upon the leading of the Holy Spirit as well as the personal instruction from the Messiah himself (**1 Peter 1:12; Luke 24:44-49**).

The Virgin Birth

Matthew, immediately following his genealogy, narrates the birth of Jesus (**Matthew 1:18-25**). In this pericope, he states that this conception came about "through the Holy Spirit" (**1:18**). He concludes this birth section with: "But he [Joseph] had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus" (**1:25**). Matthew makes clear the implications about the miraculous conception with a number of statements that leave no room to doubt that Mary was a virgin at the time of conception, even through the nine months of pregnancy. In fact, he begins this story with: "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit" (**1:18**).

After relating these events to his readers, he recalls a prophecy foretold by Isaiah (**7:14**), who prophesied during the Assyrian Empire, concerning the virgin birth that would occur over seven hundred years later in days of King Herod (**Matthew 2:1**). . This initial prophecy occurred during the time Ahaz reigned over Judah (**Isaiah 7:1**). The first of Matthew's fulfillment quotations appears in this birth narrative. Matthew, without equivocation, writes: "All this took place **to fulfill** what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us'" (**Matthew 1:22-23**). This first fulfillment quotation interrupts the story and stands out as a comment from Matthew. By pointing out the perfect continuity between the Old Testament and this birth event, Matthew is able to convince his readers of the validity of the birth of Jesus and, at the same time, establish the role of God in all these events. Matthew's quotation from Isaiah predicts the virginal conception of the Messiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (**7:14**). This child would be recognized as Immanuel, even though his "given name" is to be Jesus (**Matthew 1:21**). In this whole birth story by Matthew, one quickly sees the direction of God in this episode just as he was in control in the Hezekiah drama. The dream (**1:20**) and the citation of **Isaiah 7:14** helps to confirm the power that God exercises throughout this narrative. For Matthew, the Old Testament unmistakably authenticates what he reports. Surely, Jesus must have discussed this specific prophecy of Isaiah, as well as many of his other prophecies with His disciples in Galilee (see **Luke 24:44-48**).

One cannot help but reflect upon **chapter 9 of Isaiah** when he refers to this one called Immanuel in **7:14**:

> For to us a child is born,
> to us a son is given,
> and the government will be on his shoulders.
> **And he will be called**
> **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**
> **Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.
> [7]Of the increase of his government and peace
> there will be no end.
> He will reign on David's throne
> and over his kingdom,
> establishing and upholding it
> with justice and righteousness

from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this (**Isaiah 9:6-7**).

Another known messianic prophecy is also in **chapters 11** and **53**, plus many others. **Chapter 11** is about the Branch from Jesse and **chapter 53** is about the Suffering Servant. Luke in his second book, also writes to Theophilus an interesting account of a conversation that took place between Philip, one of the seven deacons (**Acts 6:1-7**) and the Ethiopian (**8:26-39**). Why mention Philip in the fulfillment prophecies? Well, Philip responds to a question asked by the Ethiopian in his reading of **Isaiah 53** as to whom the prophet had reference.

> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (**Acts 8:34-35**).

One should remember that Philip, too, had contact, and no doubt instructions, from the Twelve. Luke mentions the earlier appointment of Philip as one of the seven deacons assigned to assist the Grecian widows (**Acts 6:1**). Following this episode, Philip appears to have assumed the ministry of the word (**8:5**). Prior to this call, Luke says that

> the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (**Acts 6:2-4**).

Born in Bethlehem

Now, let us turn our attention to another fulfillment prophecy. In the Bethlehem prophecy, it is not Matthew that identifies **Micah 5:2** as the birthplace of the Messiah, but it is the religious leaders. In this pericope, Matthew does not interrupt the flow of the text with another fulfillment quotation, but he does record the answer of the chief priest and the teachers of the law in their response to Herod's request as to the place of the birth of "the one who has been born king of the Jews" (**Matthew 2:2**). God spoke and it came to pass. God is in control of all history.

Escape to Egypt

It is not always easy to discern the principles of interpretation that govern Matthew's interpretation of prophecy. Sometimes prophecies seem to have a literal fulfillment and, at other times, appear to be interpreted typologically. Even though the correspondence between prophecy and its fulfillment is not obvious on the surface, one quickly sees that the ancient writings contain the foreshadowing of present events. It is obvious, almost without saying, that God is still guiding Israel's history in His intervention of the flight to Egypt **(Matthew 2:13-15**). The formula-quotations are all spoken by Matthew himself and are a key component in each of the citations from the Old Testament. Matthew, through the personal instructions of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, evaluates the messianic prophecies in assessing the salvation-historical significance of the events in the life of Christ. The formula-quotations, which are peculiar to Matthew, highlight some ten occurrences associated with the life of Jesus as being specific examples of the fulfillment of prophecy.

Egypt was the land of refuge for the sons of Israel (Jacob). Just as Israel, who was God's son, found refuge in the person of Jacob in Egypt and was later called out, so also, Jesus, Son of God, finds refuge in Egypt and is later called out (**Matthew 2:13-15**). Even though this "calling out" had its original *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) in the land of Egypt for Israel (God's son), nevertheless, God foreshadows the ultimate fulfillment through His Son Jesus being called out of Egypt. Once more, Matthew brings to the attention of his readers the precise continuity between the Old Testament and the event. In the formula-quotations there is always the sense of divine predestination in the present events: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (**Hosea 11:1**). There is correspondence, but there is not a one-to-one correspondence. One must never forget that Matthew's own convictions about the Old Testament were formed from the teachings of Christ Himself.

Undoubtedly, many in the first century read the Old Testament in its unity as pointing to the Messiah as the fulfillment of Israel's history. It is not what did the prophet say, but rather, What did the prophecy mean? And this could only be unfolded from history. Historically, **Hosea 11:1** referred to God's deliverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. One must not forget that it was God who brought the Israelite's out of Egypt. In delivering them, He remembered His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-14). God preserved a particular nation to safeguard the salvation of the world through which the redeemer would come.

God's dealings with Israel is not limited to one event, but rather, to many events that are simply components in the overall scheme of redemption that eventually ushered in the coming of the Messiah. It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew's application of the fulfillment formula is not just typological interpretation, though it is that, but stems from Jehovah's statement about "my son" (**Hosea 11:1**), which suggest to Matthew the greater "Son of God." This same type reasoning is also demonstrated by Paul in the typological prefigurement in the designation of Abraham's seed as a nation (**Genesis 13:15-16; 15:5**) and also as an individual (**Galatians 3:16**). If Hosea had been prompted to say "people" or "sons", the message would have lost half its relevance. As stated above, Matthew's interpretation is aided by the instruction of Jesus both before and after the resurrection, along with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (**John 14:25-26**).

CONCLUSION

This sermon briefly summarizes three of the fulfillment citations: (1) the virgin birth, (2) the birthplace of the Messiah, and (3) the calling of God's Son from Egypt. The objective of this sermon is designed to acquaint you with the fulfillment formula, not a detailed exposition of the various texts in which Matthew applies certain prophecies to the coming of the Messiah. For Matthew, the virgin birth (**Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 7:14**), the Messiah's birthplace (**Matthew 2:5-6; Micah 5:1-2**), the slaughter of infants (**Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:15**) are literal. But the "slaughter of the infants" takes on an additional factor of partial fulfillment, not just literal as in the birth and birthplace of the Coming One. On the other hand, the Messiah's infancy in Egypt (**Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1**) appears to be more typological than literal, even though the Messiah did physically come out of Egypt.

Eschatological Judgment In Matthew 24:1--25:13

Dallas Burdette: March 7, 1998

Thrust Statement: **The end of the age of apostate Jerusalem is near.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 24:1—25:13**

Matthew 24 is on the lips of every Christian as he or she contemplates the "last days." For many Christians, the phrase *last days* is interpreted as the end of the world. It is not uncommon for Christians to cite Jesus' comments about "wars and rumors of wars" to suggest that the modern events of "wars and rumors of wars" signal the end of the Christian age. On the one hand, there are many believers who interpret **Matthew 24:1-35** as describing the destruction of Jerusalem and **verses 36-51** as picturing the end of the world. But, on the other hand, there are those who interpret the whole of **Matthew 24:1-51** as depicting the end of the Jewish age as culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, not the final return of our Lord Jesus.

There are few elements in the Bible that present more problems for Christians than the eschatological passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the book of Revelation. The graphic language employed by Jesus is frequently applied literally by many interpreters, and, as a result of wooden literalness, many wild and bizarre interpretations are concocted to uphold the so-called "rapture" interpretation and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. One objective in this sermon is to help each of us not to strain and stretch the text beyond the original intent of the author. We become disloyal interpreters whenever we depart from the original and natural meaning of the text. Every interpreter, as much as possible, must be conscious of his perception and not allow his expectations to guide the questions that he asks. This is more easily said than done!

Before we embark upon an analysis of **Matthew 24**, I would like to call attention to the fact that God is in control, not man. Jesus, in this Olivet Discourse, asserts that God controls the direction of

history. He called His disciples to be patient and to proclaim His good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus (**Matthew 24:14**). As one reflects upon the nearing end of apostate Jerusalem, one cannot help but reflect upon the righteousness of God in his determination to bring about the punishment of those who rejected Jesus as God's anointed One. It is in this vein that Paul reflects upon **Matthew 24** when he writes to the Thessalonians.

> Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. **All this is evidence that God's judgment is right**, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who **do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to **you (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**).

Since the Jewish nation, as a whole, rejected the "righteousness of God" made available through Jesus (**Romans 10:1-4**), then, God determined to obliterate the Jewish nation with its temple and bring in a "new heaven and new earth" (**Revelation 21:1**). This nation fought against Christ and His messengers (This rejection of His messengers is what the Parable of the Sheep and Goats [**Matthew 25:31-46**] is all about.). This display of the righteousness of God in **Matthew 24** is the same righteous judgment that Paul also develops in his **Roman** letter (see **chapters 1 and 2**) concerning God's righteous indignation against man's sinful behavior.

Out of this eschatological message of Jesus, one comes away with an awareness that ethical behavior is "part and parcel" of the message of the gospel. For one not to "obey the gospel" is to neglect the ethical behavior in his or her Christian walk. It is this concept that Paul also develops in **Romans 6:17-18**: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly **obeyed the form of teaching** to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." It appears, so it seems to me, that the "form of teaching" and obedience to the gospel both entail ethical standards of behavior for the people of God. This kind of behavior is something that the religious leaders did not possess and, as a result, did not know God.

As one reads **Matthew 24**, one quickly discovers that Israel paved the way for her own destruction in Jerusalem in AD 70. She had relentlessly persecuted God's messengers and His people as a whole, especially His messengers. The book of Acts is an account of the persecutions that Jesus warned His disciples about before it happened **(Matthew 10:17-26**). In Jesus renunciation of the religious hypocrites for their persecution of His prophets and wise men and teachers, He captures their utter destruction with the following words: "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation" (**23:35-36**). Jesus says that these events will all come upon "this generation." Then, Jesus, once more, begins to elaborate in more detail what he had just said:

> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen

> gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (**23:37-39**).

God is going to judge the unrighteous. Jesus sets forth this same principle of judgment in His Sermon on the Mount (**5:1—7:29**). Following His departure from the temple, His disciples call attention to the magnificence of the temple and its buildings (**24:1**). He then proceeds to point out that "not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (**24:2**). Luke also records Jesus' prediction of the desolation of Jerusalem (**Luke 21**). But in the Gospel of Luke, this desolation of Jerusalem is the third time that Jesus makes reference to this utter devastation of Jerusalem and its temple (**13:31-35; 19:41-44**). In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, one discovers that God breaks once more into the history of Israel. This breaking in of God into history is set forth in apocalyptic language.

The disciples immediately wanted to know when these things would occur: "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (**Matthew 24:3**). As to when all this would occur, Jesus says, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (**24:36**). But He did forewarn them of signs that would precede the end of the Jewish age (the old heaven and earth). Some of these signs included many coming in His name and claiming "I am the Christ," "wars and rumors of wars," "famines and earthquakes," persecution of His disciples, and the love of many growing cold (**24:4-13**).

In spite of all these signs, nevertheless, the end is not yet. Before the end of the age, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached," says Jesus, "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (**24:14**). As the end of the age, not the end of the world, draws near, Jesus sets forth another piece of the puzzle to help them discern the signs of the time:

> "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (**24:15-22**).

Both Matthew and Mark (**13:14-20**) speak of "the abomination that causes desolation." But Luke rephrases the events that would follow the natural catastrophes and other signs:

> **When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near**. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all

> the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (**Luke 21:20-24**).

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus forewarned His disciples about the impending destruction on Jerusalem—"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." He told them to flee whenever they saw the approaching armies of Rome. They were not even to take the time to go back into their houses to get their belongings (**Matthew 24:17**). Get out immediately, said Jesus. This was a time of punishment for their rejection of Jesus and His messengers. Apostate Jerusalem had to be taken out of the way to make way for the "new heaven and a new earth" (**Revelation 21:1**), that is to say, the church, which our Lord purchased with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**). Paul, in his Galatian letter, speaks of "the Jerusalem that is above" as being our mother (**Galatians 4:26**). With the final overthrow of apostate Jerusalem, John says,

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (**Revelation 21:1-4**).

All of these events transpired in the fulfillment of Scripture. Unfaithfulness is something that God does not tolerate. Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, after rebuking the religious leaders, says that it is "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" **(Matthew 7:21).** Jerusalem will become a trampled city.

Jesus, following the foretelling of the total destruction of Jerusalem, describes the transpiring events in apocalyptic language, which is often associated with the final return of Christ. But this forbidding rhetoric is descriptive of the national desolation of the city turned harlot, not the end of the world; it is also expressive of the coming judgment of Christ upon those who refused Him as the anointed One of God. Listen to the poetic language of Jesus as He describes this out and out wreckage of this sinful and wicked nation:

> Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (**Matthew 24:29-32**).

At first glance, this apocalyptic language appears to describe the final coming (sometimes referred to as the Second Coming of Christ) in judgment upon the wicked in general. But a close reading of the Matthean text with the Lukan narrative reveals another story. Luke gives additional comments that Matthew does not record. For instance, "They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (**Luke 24:25**). One should reflect on "trampled on by the Gentiles" before reading the

apocalyptic language that follows. There is a great deal of similarity between Matthew and Luke, but still, Luke gives a slight change in reading that sheds additional light on this difficult pericope (section).

> There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (**Luke 21:25-28**).

"The Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" refers to His coming in judgment on Jerusalem, not the final coming. In essence, this "coming" is the Second Coming of Christ in judgment upon spiritual Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus had previously warned and told His disciples about this specific coming in His kingdom:

> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (**Matthew 16:24-28**).

Jesus refers to this trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles as the Son of Man coming "in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (**16:27**). In Matthew 24, which describes the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus once more depicts this overthrow of this wicked nation as the Son of Man coming in His glory: "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the sign of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (**24:30**). Jesus even concludes His judgment on the religious leaders with this reference to His coming: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. [32] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (**25:31-32**). This appears, so it seems to me, to be the warning of Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

> All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you (**2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**).

The language that Paul employs appears to be a reminiscence of the words spoken by our Lord Jesus. The poetic language that Jesus uses is similar to the poetic language that Isaiah uses to prophesy against Babylon:

> See, **the day of the LORD** is coming
> —a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—
> to make the land desolate
> and destroy the sinners within it.
> [10] The stars of heaven and their constellations
> will not show their light.
> he rising sun will be darkened
> and the moon will not give its light.
> [11] I will punish the world for its evil,
> the wicked for their sins.
> I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty
> and will humble the pride of the ruthless.
> [12] I will make man scarcer than pure gold,
> more rare than the gold of Ophir.
> [13] **Therefore I will make the heavens tremble;**
> **and the earth will shake from its place**
> at the wrath of the LORD Almighty,
> in the day of his burning anger (**Isaiah 13:9-13**).

After speaking of the "rising sun" being darkened, Isaiah says that the "moon will not give its light" and that "the heavens tremble and the earth will shake from its place." Then, following this invigorating language, he cries out once more about what all this means: "Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah" (**13:19**). This overthrow of Babylon is described as "the day of the Lord" (**13:9**). Peter, in his description of the downfall of Jerusalem, also describes this punishment as a "day of the Lord."

> But the **day of the Lord** will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the **day of God** and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (**2 Peter 3:10-13**).

With the complete destruction of apostate Jerusalem, John describes the following scene:

> Then I saw a **new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for **the old order of**

> **things has passed away**." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (**Revelation 21:1-5**).

When would all these events transpire in Jesus' eschatological discourse? Listen to Jesus: "I tell you the truth, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (**Matthew 24:35-36**). Jesus had previously said to his disciples, as cited above, that: "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (**16:28**). Jesus warned them of the impending judgment: "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (**24:19-21**). This is "the day of the Lord" that the author of Hebrews encouraged the Christians to continuously encourage each other not to despair: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (**Hebrews 10:25**).

The three parables that follow the Olivet Discourse are a blanket condemnation of the religious leaders for their rejection of Jesus and His messengers. The three parables are: (1) The Parable of the Ten Virgins [**Matthew 25:1-13**]; (2) The Parable of the Talents [**25:14-30**]; The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats [**25:31-46**]. All three of these parables should be read within the context of this eschatological discourse.

CONCLUSION

God is still in control. He was in control then and He is in control now. He has been guiding the history of man since its inception in the Creation. We are now members of "a new heaven and a new earth." Since we have been reconciled to God through Jesus our Lord, we are now "a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). We are now a part of the redeemed. And because of this blessing, Paul reminds the Corinthians: "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (**6:1-2**).

Just as the first Christians did not know when the "day of the Lord" would occur in the destruction of Jerusalem, neither do we know "the day of the Lord" in His final coming. May none of us have "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (**Hebrews 3:12-14**). Do you want to escape the wrath of God? Do you want to escape the dominion of sin? Do you want to escape the curse of law? Do you want to escape judgment? If so, this can only occur "in and through Jesus" (See **Romans, chapters 5-8**).

I encourage you to not reject God's Son as the religious leaders did and bring about condemnation. Don't cast-off God's grace; Jesus is the only way of salvation. Peter says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). In conclusion, the words of the Master ring out loud and clear: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent

me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (**John 5:24**).

False Peace: Lord, Lord

Thrust Statement: **God wants His people to honor Him with their hearts, not just their lips.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:21-23**

Matthew 7:21-23 is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their separation from other devout believers. Almost every warring faction within the Churches of Christ rely upon this pericope (section of Scripture) to give validity to the spirit of sectarianism that is rampant among so many Christians. I am conscious that every Christian associated with the Churches of Christ does not promote the views set forth by many within the Stone/Campbell Movement concerning the interpretation of Jesus' saying about "Lord, Lord." There are many preachers, teachers, and elders that are seeking to bring individuals back to a sound interpretation of **Matthew 7:21-23**. Unfortunately, there are still many Christians who simply do not know that they are misapplying this now-famous text. My negative remarks are not designed to lambaste those who hold to an erroneous view, but rather to try to call attention to the context. The current view of this Scripture fosters unnecessary division and hurt among God's people.

President of Christian University

To illustrate this point of lack of understanding concerning this most abused Scripture, recently, the president of a Christian university cited this verse to rationalize his assumption that I am not going to heaven, especially since I do not hold to his views concerning instrumental music. Is he sincere? I suspect that he is. Nevertheless, I have a responsibility to call attention to the context and to cut away as much underbrush (traditions) associated with this oft quoted text. Just a few days after this encounter with this believer, I received a call from a brother who is a part of the non-institutional Church of Christ. In the course of our conversation, he related to me that

the preacher cited **Matthew 7:21** to justify his reaction of rejection to his questioning their hermeneutics (science of interpretation).

Non-Institutional Church of Christ

And

One Cup and Non-Sunday School Church of Christ

The non-institutional fellowship cites the same Scripture to condemn the one (university president) who condemned me, as stated above. On the other hand, Paul Nichols, editor and publisher of The Informer, relies upon this verse to condemn both—the university president and the non-institutional fellowship. Nichols belongs to the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. He, too, cites **Matthew 7:21** to condemn anyone who participates in Bible Study classes on Sunday morning and that also employ individual communion cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine. In his essay on "Acceptable Worship," he writes:

Jesus taught in Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." The promise of salvation in Revelation 22:14 is to those who obey God's commandments. So it is necessary, if we are to have our worship acceptable to God, to render it in the way that God has prescribed.[1]

Even though Nichols did not mention Sunday school, individual cups, instrumental music, one only has to peruse the essay to realize how he employs **Matthew 7:21**. On the other end of the spectrum, David Hester, writing for the journal, Contending for the Faith, bemoans Denny Boultinghouse for citing **Matthew 25:31-46** as the only criterion for judgment.[2] One of his chief complaints with Boultinghouse is his "practicing open fellowship with the denominations."[3] Following this criticism, he then reminds Boultinghouse that he "overlooks what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23 and a host of other Scriptures concerning the importance of doctrine and judgment."[4]

Mainline Church of Christ

Hugh Fulford, too, cites **Matthew 7:21** to bolster his concept of the Church of Christ as the only true church. In his essay, "The nature of the Church," he writes:

> Rather, we are exhorted to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:21). Jesus emphatically stated, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21). May we be stirred both to know and to do the Father's will that we might be blessed with everlasting life with him in heaven.[5]

The substance of his essay is that the Church of Christ is the only true church. He excludes his unique fellowship from being a denomination, even though it is. He states his concerns about the attitude of some Christians: "To believe 'one church is as good as another' or to think 'it is not important what you believe as long as you are

sincere' are sentiments not grounded in revealed, sacred scripture."[6] Both the non-institutional Church of Christ, and the one-cup and non-Sunday school Church of Christ apply **Matthew 7:21-23** against Fulford. The "will of the Father" depends on which one of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ to which you belong. Each congregation determines what is and what is not the "will of the Father." In every case, it always depends on the inherited traditions received from their defenders of the truth.

Liberation of Text From Tradition

It is my intent in this essay to liberate this text (**Matthew 7:21-23**) from the ecclesiastical assumptions placed upon this Scripture by many within the denominational Church of Christ. Just a perusal of the Church of Christ journal reveals the manipulative forces at work. This citation from Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount is regulated in order to support prior religious interests. Religious enthusiasm for orthodoxy within each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ takes away both reason and Revelation and substitutes in place of them the ungrounded fancies of one's own brain. It is not uncommon for Christians to read his/her own experience of his/her own unique fellowship into the world of the text. It is not uncommon for preachers and elders and leaders to place the ordinary reader at a very great distance from the text.

Once more, it is not unusual for interpreters to disengage the text from its context, which, ultimately, leads to disunity among God's people. The present day hermeneutics that is practiced among many Christians moves one from "behind" the text in order to take up a position in "front" of the text. In other words, one disassociates himself/herself from its history. This maneuver allows the exegete to manipulate the text to coincide with his/her own presuppositions, as demonstrated above. Frequently, **Matthew 7:21-23** is no more than a manipulative mouthpiece for the interpreter's own conviction or tradition.[7] In order to set the tone for the gist of this paper, a reading of the text is necessary:

> Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'[8]

The Text in Its Context

As one reads these words, one must be ever conscious of the history leading up to this stern warning by our Lord Jesus Christ. If one steps in "front" of the text, he/she may make the text refer to one's fanciful imagination. This statement by Jesus represents the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount. Just before this piercing and shocking statement by Jesus, He warned the disciples about "false prophets" (**7:15**). Externally, these individuals, religious leaders, appear as righteous, but, inwardly, they are "ferocious wolves" (**7:15**). Following this analysis of the religious leaders, Jesus

gives an illustration of a "good tree" and a "bad tree" (**7:18**). The "bad tree" cannot produce "good fruit" (**7:18**), and "every tree," says Jesus, "that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (**7:20**).

In the last week of Jesus' ministry, He again turns to the ones He addressed earlier in His Sermon on the Mount. The ones who cried: "Lord, Lord" (**7:21**) are the same ones that He now rebukes for their rejection of Him as the savior of the world (see **23:1—25:46**). Not only did Jesus pronounce seven woes against these religious leaders, but He also denounced these same individuals in His three parables in **Matthew 25**—The Parable of the Ten virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. The Parable of the Sheep and Goats (**25:31-46**) is an excellent commentary on **7:15-23**. The religious leaders rejected Jesus and His disciples. Thus, Jesus concludes this parable by saying:

> Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' [44] They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' [45] He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' [46] Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Matthew's Gospel: Book of Conflict

The Book of Matthew is a book about conflict—conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. In the first two chapters of Matthew, he foreshadows the battle between Jesus and the religious leaders. John the Baptist begins his ministry with castigation of the Pharisees and Sadducees and calls them a "brood of vipers" (**3:7**). Matthew records John's confrontation with the following words:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. [10] The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (**3:7-10**).

John the Baptist says, in addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees, "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (**3:10**). One can hardly reflect upon these words without reflection upon the words of Jesus as He warns His disciples about "false prophets": "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (**7:19**). Immediately, Jesus issues his stern warning again those who say, "Lord, Lord," but, at the same time, do not practice the Father's

will (**7:21**). Once again, if one wishes to understand **7:15-23**, in context, one needs to return to the beginning of Jesus' Sermon. Matthew calls attention to Jesus' chastisement of the religious leaders—those who cry, "Lord, Lord," in His Sermon on the Mount:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (**5:17-20**).

Jesus, like John the Baptist, delivers His Sermon on the Mount as a rebuke to the religious leaders for their lack of conformity to the teachings of God—"unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law." In this pericope (unit or section of Scripture—The Fulfillment of the Law), He speaks of the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Scribes (teachers of the law). But their righteousness was only external, not internal (see **7:15-23**—A Tree and Its Fruit). Their "acts of righteousness" (**6:1**) were performed for show (**6:1**). Jesus enumerates three "acts of righteousness" carried out by the religious leaders in order to draw attention to the externality of their so-called devotion to God: (1) giving to the needy [**6:1-4**], (2) prayer [**6:5-15**], and (3) fasting [**6:16-18**].

After Jesus rebuked the so-called righteousness of the religious leaders (**5:17-20**), he attacked their looseness in handling the Word of God. In **5:21-48**, Jesus compares the traditions of the religious leaders with the Word of God itself. Jesus begins by calling attention to the traditions that made the Word of God of no effect by saying: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago (**5:21**), but, on the other hand, Jesus seeks to bring the religious leaders back to Holy Scripture by saying: "But I tell you" (**5:22**). Six times in this short sermon, Jesus removes all of the underbrush that the religious leaders employed to nullify the effectiveness of God's Word.

Following the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew reveals the calling of the twelve. In this first commission (**chapter 10**), Jesus warns His disciples about the impending danger of the religious leaders:

> I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. [17] "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.

Just as John the Baptist and Jesus encountered the religious leaders, so, now, Jesus warns His disciples about the danger they, too, would face from the religious leaders and the people. It is significant that Jesus does not say that they will flog you in the synagogues, but rather, they will "flog you in their synagogues." In **chapter 12 of**

Matthew, one sees a direct confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. When the Pharisees saw the disciples of Jesus picking grain on the Sabbath day, they complained (**12:1-2**). As a result of this action of picking grain on the Sabbath day, Jesus entered into conflict with the leaders. Following this clash, Matthew reports once more: "Going on from that place, he went into their synagogues" (**12:9**). Throughout the Book of Matthew, Matthew appears to use the phrase, "their synagogues," in a sneering sense (see also **4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 13:54**, five times).

Once again in **chapter 12, Matthew** records another encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees (**Verse 24**). Matthew says that a man was brought to Jesus that was both blind and dumb, and He healed him (**Verse 22**). The people were astonished and exclaimed: "Could this be the Son of David" (**Verse 23**)? But this act infuriated the religious leaders once more. Beginning with **chapter 12**, one witnesses an escalation of the hostilities of Pharisees and the teachers of the law, which hatred ultimately ended in the crucifixion of Jesus. In **12:38-45**, one again sees the Pharisees and the teachers of the law seeking a miraculous sign from Him. Jesus then called "this generation" a wicked and adulterous generation (**12:39**). Jesus had already performed many miraculous signs (see **chapters 8 and 9**).

Matthew 7:21-23: Evildoers

The word *conflict* should flash like neon lights across the pages of Matthew's Gospel. As stated earlier, the Book of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that Jesus describes as "ferocious wolves." These are the ones that Jesus has in mind when he says:

> Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' [23] Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (**7:21-23**).

Following five parables in **Matthew 13**, one is once more confronted with the callousness of the hearts of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (**15:1-9**). The religious leaders were more concerned about their traditions—washing hands before eating (**15:1-2**) than they were of God's commandments—taking care of parents in their old age (**15:3-9**). Jesus goes right to the jugular vein of their covetousness as He deals with their traditions versus what God's Word demands of them. Listen to Jesus as He penetrates the utter foulness and wickedness of their souls:

> Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? [4] For God said, 'Honor your father and mother'[a] and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[b] [5] But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' [6] he is not to 'honor his father[c]' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. [7] You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: [8] "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from

me. [9] They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men' (**15:3-9**).[9]

These are the ones to whom Jesus speaks when he says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (**7:21**). The Pharisees and the teachers of the law honored God with their lips, but, on the other hand, their hearts were far from God. These are the same individuals that Jesus calls "evildoers" (**7:23**). Today, countless sincere Christians cite **Matthew 7:21-23** to condemn other Christians who employ instrumental music in their praise to God, who employ individual cups in the Lord's Supper, who break the bread in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, who use wine in the Lord's Supper, who use kitchens in their church buildings, and so on. Christians who participate in these things are referred to as "evildoers," or as "wicked" people.

The ones that Jesus calls "evildoers" were guilty of unethical behavior and were traditionists for the things of men, not the things of God; thus, Jesus, in his final week—Passion Week—called them "hypocrites" (**Matthew 23**). This passage has nothing to do with the many issues that Christians are divided over. Individuals are not "evildoers" or "wicked" because they praise God with an instrument while they sing. Again, whether one uses one cup or individual cups in the observance of the Lord's Super does not make one "wicked." For Christians to utilize this Scripture in this way is to wrest this Scripture from its context. The traditional interpretation, within many of the Churches of Christ, has become normative and is passed on to succeeding generations as authoritative.

Seven Woes

During Passion Week—last week of Jesus' earthly life—Jesus went right to the heart of the religious leaders ethical behavior and disregard for the Word of God. Just a casual reading of **Matthew 23** reveals the full weight of **Matthew 7:21**. In other words, **Matthew 23** is an excellent commentary on **7:21**, which is frequently abused by many Christians. Jesus explains that the "teachers of the law and the Pharisees" (**23:2**) "do not practice what they preach" (**23:3**). Just as Jesus calls attention to the external acts of righteousness in His Sermon on the Mount (**6:1-18**), so again, in his final hours, He calls attention to behavior that is done, not from the heart, to be seen of men: "Everything they do is done for men to see" (**23:5**).

The very persons who should have opened the people's minds concerning Jesus and the kingdom of God locked this realm by their refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah and their faulty interpretation of salvation being through law, not by faith. The "teachers of the law and Pharisees" actually "shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces," said Jesus. Again He says, "You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to." (**23:13**). Not only did the religious leaders exclude the people from knowledge about God's reign, but they also excluded from their communion anyone who refused to conform to their philosophy of a legalistic mind-set of religion. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount begins an assault upon their censorious, or hypercritical, judgments of all who did not fit into their mold of self-righteousness and strict adherence to the tradition of the elders (see **Matthew 7:1-14; Acts 15:1-2; Galatians 2:1-5**).

Castigation of Religious Leaders: Hypocrites

The word *hypocrite* occurs in the Book of Matthew thirteen times, always associated with the religious leaders (**Matthew 6:2, 5; 6:16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23: 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51**).[10] In order to graphically illustrate Jesus' rebuke and condemnation of the religious leaders in **Matthew 23**, the following chart helps to grasp why Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (**7:21**):

Matthew 23:13	**Matthew 23:15**
Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.	Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Matthew 23:23	**Matthew 23:25**
Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.	Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Matthew 23:27-28	**Matthew 23:29**
Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.	Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites**! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.

These religious leaders were men who were "full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (**23:28**). They were leaders who "neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (**23:23**). They were "full of greed and self-indulgence" (**23:25**). For one to take the phrase, "does the will of my Father" and apply that phrase to instrumental music, individual cups, Sunday school, kitchens in the church building, grape juice only in the Lord's Supper—not wine, and so on, violate this citation. Today, just as in Jesus' day, the powerful have a difficult time in hearing God's Word accurately. Tradition and money often stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text. Political power often interferes with sound exegetical methods of interpreting the Scriptures. It is not uncommon for churches and Christian schools to make the interpretation of the church fathers as normative and authoritative.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart correctly assert: "We also tend to think that our understanding is the same thingsas the Holy Spirit's or human author's intent. However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas."[11] Whenever one approaches **Matthew 7:21**, one must move toward the text with an awareness of the whole book, not just an isolated passage that is alienated from its context. Again, one must ever be conscious of his/her theological heritage and ecclesiastical traditions. The religious leaders in Jesus' day formed brotherhoods to exclude those who did not adjust to their traditions. Even today many religious leaders do not allow for differences over their supposed infallible interpretation.

It is not uncommon for believers to lock the kingdom of heaven against anyone who does not adjust his/her views to the special brand of orthodoxy or understanding of God's Word as advanced by a select few would-be interpreters. In other words, one's relationship to God is dependant upon one's submission to absolute conformity to a particular splinter group, at least to some fellowships. Within many Churches of Christ, as well as some Church of Christ universities, the reign of God's favor is shut to anyone who fails to comply with the status quo. In spite of the New Testament writers' warning against the dangers of exclusiveness, many still continue to practice blackballing Christians who refuse to kow-tow to the pressures of the ones in authority (see **1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 8:1-6; Romans 14—16**).

Jesus: The Will of My Father

Since the words of Jesus in **Matthew 23** are an excellent commentary on His words in **Matthew 7:21**, it would be helpful, once more, to cite from **Matthew 23** in order to try to ascertain more clearly the significance of the phrase "will of my Father." The words found in **Matthew 23:23-24** illustrates what the will of the Father is not:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. [24] You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

The will of the Father is concerned with the "more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness." This same sentiment is expressed in **Micah** (735 BC): "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (**6:8**). The religious leaders were more concerned about the externals in their religious devotion to God than they were in the weightier matters of the Law. So today, Christians must have a deep concern for justice, warmth toward the weak, loyalty to holiness in one's walk with God, and compassion in one's daily walk with the Father.

Following the seven woes pronounced upon the religious leaders, Jesus issues three parables following His forecast of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matthew 24).[12] In His Parable of the Sheep and Goats (**25:31-46**),[13] one is confronted with what really matters—acceptance of Jesus and His disciples. These verses are an excellent illustration of what our Lord Jesus means when he says, " Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven." In **7:22**, Jesus gives the response of the religious leaders: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'" One may perform all the externals—externals associated with the so-called five acts of worship performed on Sunday morning—and still be lost. One must not fail to put into practice the principles that Jesus teaches in His Sermon on the Mount.

John, one of the three who frequently found themselves alone with Jesus, wrote: "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (**1 John 3:23**). Believe and love are not two commands, but rather are two parts of the one command. One cannot separate love for one's brother/sister in Christ from faith in Jesus. Perhaps, the following chart will set forth in clear terms what it is that God is concerned about:

Isaiah 58: 5-7	**Matthew 25:34-40**
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?	Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit

	you?' [40] "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

One cannot read Isaiah and Jesus' words in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats without correlation between the two. James, the Lord's brother, also expresses the same sentiments: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (**James 1:17**). Again, what is the "will of the Father"? Listen to John, one of the twelve, as he seeks to capture the very heart of it all:

> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. [15] Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. [16] This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. [17] If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? [18] Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. [19] This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence [20] whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (**1 John 3:14-20**).

CONCLUSION

Since my (Dallas Burdette) religious background is associated within the Churches of Christ, I am qualified to set forth the traditional interpretation of **Matthew 7:21**. As a young preacher, I cited this verse to condemn every religious fellowship that did not agree with my very narrow and legalistic concept of Christianity—one cup and no Sunday school. A word of caution is necessary in my concluding remarks. Many Christians within the Churches of Christ have sought/are seeking to correct this misapplication. Scores of Christians no longer employ this verse as a hatchet to hack to death those who refuse to cave in to sloppy exegesis. At the same time, there are still numerous Christians within the Stone/Campbell Movement who frequently employ the traditional interpretation in order to keep sheep from straying from the sectarian fold. It is my desire to stop this kind of abuse—separation from other sincere Christians; thus, My remarks are toward those who continue to utilize **Matthew 7:21** to give, supposedly, validity to their unfounded position of sectarianism—all in the name of God.

Since there are three laws of learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repletion, it would be helpful once more to recall the sayings of Jesus against the religious leaders in Israel. In His conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as "blind" five times (**22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26**) and as "hypocrites" six times (**23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29**). These leaders did not go for inner purity but were

content with externals (**23:23, 27-28**). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on "justice, mercy and faithfulness" (**23:23**). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (**23:15**). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders' hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (**23:33**)
- Lawless (**23:23, 28**)
- Extortionist (**23:25**)
- Self-indulgent (**23:25**)
- Hypocrites (**23:28**)
- Abusive (**23:34**)
- Murderous (**23:34-35**)

Jesus' castigation of the above leaders' unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his Gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus:

> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, [4] and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. [5] "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people" (**Matthew 26:3-4**).

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (**24:14-16**). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (**26:47**). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (**26:59-60**). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (**26:65-68**). Once again, while Jesus was on the cross, they mocked Him (**27:41-43**). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (**27:62-66**). Is it any wonder that Jesus issued His denunciation of the religious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount (**7:15-23**). When the a crowd asked Jesus about what works God requires, Jesus responded by saying, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (**John 28-29**).

Matthew 7:21 is frequently approached with a strong subjective bias. In other words, this text is viewed through the colored glasses of tradition. If one wishes to read out of this Scripture, rather than into it, one must read the whole of Matthew's Gospel, otherwise one's own frame of reference enters into one's interpretation, which will be

skewed. Every interpreter must exert every effort to escape the subjective world of his culture. Frequently, Christians employ the Bible to prove their biased perspective of **Matthew 7:21** in order to maintain loyalty to his/her heritage of orthodoxy.

It goes almost without saying, whatever the author means by what he/she says is the only meaning that one should attach to his/her words. When one adds a meaning that was not the intent of the author, one violates the basic principle of sound hermeneutics. Robert stein zeros in on the very heart of understanding an author: "The way an author helps his readers understand the meaning he seeks to convey is through the context."[14] The traditional reading of the passage (**Matthew 7:21**) by the various splinter groups within the Churches of Christ is not a word from God, but rather it is a word from a confused reader. One must not tear this text out of its context, otherwise one abuses God's Word just as Satan did in his citing from **Psalm 91:11-12** to Jesus (see **Matthew 4:5-7**). And, finally, the words of Gordon Fee are worth citing: "They allow tradition, not Scripture, to have the final word."[15]

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[1] Paul O. Nichols, "Acceptable Worship," in *The Informer* 15, no. 12 (June 1996): 2.

[2] David W. Hester, "Renewal or Ruin?, in *Contending for the Faith* 27, no. 5 (May 1996): 16.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Hugh Fulford, "The Nature of the Church," in *The Spiritual Sword* 28, no. 3 (April 1997): 24.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 10-36, for an excellent and insightful discussion of how to avoid the trap of reading into the Scriptures one's own presuppositions. I am indebted to Thiselton for this article and have taken advantage of his unique phraseology for capturing the heart of sound exegesis.

[8] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[9] For a detailed study of this text (15:1-9), see Dallas Burdette, "The Fossilized Traditions of Men," [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 6 September 2002), located under caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[10] For a detained study of the Pharisees, see "Political Power of the Pharisees and Their Oral Traditions" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 6 September 6, 2002). Located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under ELDERS/LEADERS.

[11] Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 16.

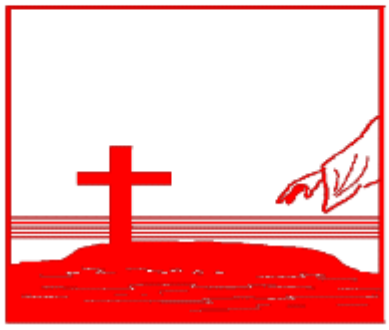
[12] For a detained study on Matthew 24, see "Eschatological Judgments in Matthew 24" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 6 September 6, 2002). Located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and under NEW TESTAMENT and then under MATTHEW.

[13] For a detained study of this parable, see "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 6 September 6, 2002). Located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and under NEW TESTAMENT and then under MATTHEW.

[14] Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57.

[15] Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 29.

Grace Beyond Comprehension



Thrust Statement: **Jesus hammered home this doctrine of forgiveness toward others as essential to God's forgiveness.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 18:23-35**

This parable is a story that stands out in biblical history as a narrative about forgiveness—forgiveness that is unimaginable. One cannot read this account of the merciful king and the unforgiving servant without reflection upon the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (**Matthew 6:12**).[1] This scenario is a clear call to the focus of the Gospel of God—forgiveness in and through Jesus Christ. As one reads this short parable, one hears within his or her innermost being the warning, "go home and do the same." Christians want forgiveness, but, at the same time, they find it difficult to forgive others. This parable demands that individuals incorporate the sprit of forgiveness into their daily walk with God. One objective of this study is to call attention to the need of forgiveness toward all people.

Jesus hammered home, as it were, this doctrine of forgiveness. On one occasion, Jesus spoke to His disciples about forgiveness within the context of parables dealing with the lost (**Luke 15**): "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. [4] If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (**Luke 17:3**). Jesus constantly drove home this point about forgiveness, which is what the Gospel of Christ is about. It is in this regard that Isaiah writes with exactness: "He bore the sin of many" (**Isaiah 53:12**). Jeremiah, who speaks of the Messianic age, writes: "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (**Jeremiah 31:34**). Some of the last words that Jesus uttered upon the Cross were about forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**).

In the reading of this parable, one observes Jesus, according to Matthew's account, addressing the subject of forgiveness prior to His telling the story of the merciful king and the unforgiving servant: "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,

‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ [22] Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (**Matthew 18:21-23**).[a] This moving story about the unforgiving servant follows immediately (**18:23-35**) and concludes with a strong denunciation against an unforgiving spirit: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (**18:35**).

One cannot read the conversation between Peter and Jesus without awareness that one who “counts” has not forgiven at all. Paul seems to reflect this same mindset when he writes to the Corinthians about love: “It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs” (**1 Corinthians 13:5**). Surely, Peter must have considered his exchange with Jesus when he wrote his first epistle: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (**1 Peter 4:8**). Pay attention to Jesus as he tells the heart wrenching story of the servant who failed to show mercy when he had himself received abundant mercy:

> [23] “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. [24] As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents[b] was brought to him. [25] Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. [26] “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ [27] The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. [28] “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.[c] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. [29] “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ [30] “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. [31] When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. [32] “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. [33] Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ [34] In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. [35] “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (**Matthew 18:23-35**).

This parable sets forth judgment for the individual who fails to render obedience to God’s will—forgiveness toward others. How should men and women react when others sin against them? Everyone is conscious that life demands responsibility of forbearance, mercy, and leniency toward impious, irreligious, unspiritual, or wicked behavior. When one violates the rights of others, society demands an accounting for ungodly behavior. If one takes his or her behavior toward others seriously, he or she would take God seriously about pardon. Since one is always conscious of his or her own sins, this understanding should make a difference in one’s

conduct toward those who sin against him or her. If one expects God's amnesty through repentance, then one should exercise this same mercy toward those who sin against him or her. How can one pray, "Forgive us our debts" if one is not willing to forgive other "debtors" (**6:12**)?

No one is without sin: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," writes Paul (**Romans 3:23**). This parable of Jesus (**Matthew 18:23-35**) is reminiscent of Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in the act of adultery, as recorded by John. Listen to this narrative as John seeks to call attention to sin and forgiveness:

> 1 † Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. 2 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6 † This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 † She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more (**John 8:1-11**).[2]

As one reads the parable about forgiveness, one is immediately confronted with a view of what the kingdom of heaven (ηΣ βασιλειψα τω'ν ουζρανω'ν &h basileia twn ouranwn) is like. In other words, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of heaven is like the following story—a story of grace and mercy. In this story, God does not want His people to be like the unforgiving servant. In this narrative, Jesus draws a distinction between debt that is impossible to repay and a trifling debt that is easily manageable. Jesus speaks of a debt that amounts to "ten thousand talents" (**Matthew 18:24**) and a debt that totals "a hundred denarii" (**18:28**). In order to fully grasp the significance between the two debts, one must understand something of the monetary value involved. Eugene Boring explains the monetary value of ten thousand talents:

> A talent is the largest monetary unit (20.4 kg of silver), equal to 6,000 drachmas, the wages of a manual laborer for fifteen years. "Ten thousand" (μυριαψ murias, "myriad") is the largest possible number. Thus the combination is the largest figure that can be given. The annual tax income for all of Herod the Great's territories was 900 talents per year. Ten thousand talents would exceed the taxes for all of Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, and Samaria. The amount is fantastic, beyond all calculation.[3]

Warren W. Wiersbe writes that a man in that day would have to work for twenty years to earn one talent.[4] In this parable, one witnesses in miniature what the Gospel is about—forgiveness. Vernon McGee estimates that the amount (10,000 talents) is equal to 12,000,000 dollars.[5] On the other hand, the one hundred denarii (hundred pence[c], KJV) are equivalent to seventeen dollars.[6] When one compares twelve million dollars to seventeen dollars, one quickly sees the mercy and grace of God in His dealings with the sins of humanity. Since this story is about the "kingdom of heaven," one can quickly observe in this narrative a picture of one's spiritual bankruptcy before God. The amount of debt is so stupendous for both men and women that no one could ever remove this debt. This debt is so immense in the eyes of God that only God Himself can remove. Based on human frailty, there is a total inability to pay such a gigantic sum. Yet, in this pericope, Jesus gives an insight as to the compassion of God in His dealings with the sins of mankind.

Jesus speaks of the "lord" in the parable as having pity (σπλαγχνιψζομαι splagcnizomai, "compassion"), a word that is frequently employed of Christ toward multitudes and individual sufferers (**Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34**). Compassion is the inner drive of God from which mercy flows. This sympathy resulted in forgiveness (αςφη΄κεν afhken, "forgave"). Lenski's comments unfolds the magnitude of this Greek word afhken: "The verb αςφη΄κεν (afhken) is most significant: 'he remitted' the debt, literally, 'dismissed and sent it away.'"[7] For the believer, God accomplishes this forgiveness through the atonement of Christ upon the Cross. This meaning of this Greek word (afhken) as used by Jesus is set forth in a psalm of David: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (**Psalm 103:12**).[8] God, through Jesus, removes transgressions. There is a sense in which this parable paints a photograph of biblical justification—God declares the sinner free from guilt. Micah, too, declares God's forgiveness this way: "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (**Micah 7:19**). This is what the "king" does for his servant in this story.

Jesus uses hyperbole (overstatement) in this parable in order to bring home the compassion of God toward the sinner and to illustrate the importance of His people extending forgiveness to those who sin against them. As stated above, ten thousand talents exceeded the taxes for all of Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, and Samaria. In other words, Jesus is saying that the sins committed against another human being is comparatively small in comparison to one's sins against God, only seventeen dollars versus twelve million (one denarii = 17 cents). The ten thousand talents illustrates that one's debt is so immensely large that it cannot be estimated or numbered, so to speak. The king of this servant represents the mercy of God to men and women. Both have sinned. Both equally owe to God more than one can pay. They equally deserve to be punished, but God has mercy (compassion).

Since God extends such pardon, individuals must also extend forgiveness to those who request. Jesus illustrates the forgiven (the king's servant) by his refusal to forgive (his debtor). In fact, says Jesus, this man who was forgiven such a great debt went out and found a person who owed him just one hundred denarri (seventeen dollars) and "grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' He demanded" (**Matthew 18:28**). This servant too fell to his knees and begged for mercy,

but no mercy. He was thrown into prison until he could pay (**28:29-30**). This ghastly behavior was reported back to the "lord," and he took drastic measures against this ungrateful and unforgiving servant. This man (debtor to the man (king) who had forgiven) was arrested and turned over to the jailors to be tormented (**18:34**). Do you recall the way Jesus began this parable about forgiveness? Pay attention once more: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants" (**18:23**). As Jesus concludes his remarks about forgiveness, he goes right to the very heart of forgiveness and compassion and kindness: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (**18:35**).

For one to receive God's remission of sins without extending forgiveness to others who sin against him or her is moral outrage. God's indescribable kindness should melt the hearts of men and women toward others with mercy and compassion. This parable, according to Jesus, is intended as a warning against the unmerciful. This acquittal must be genuine—"forgive your brother from your heart." This kind of clemency cannot just come from the lips—no pretense. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he, no doubt, reflected upon this heart-wrenching story as he admonishes the saints: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (**Colossians 3:13**). It is also in this same regard that Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (**Ephesians 4:32**).

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the comments about mercy: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy (**Matthew 5:7**)? Luke reports a sermon of Jesus in which Jesus said: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (**Luke 7:36**). Straight away following these comments, Jesus once more reinforces the need to forgive: "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (**7:37**). This parable (**Matthew 18**) is about the kingdom of heaven and forgiveness. One cannot discuss these two subjects without reflection upon God's scheme of redemption "in" and "through" Christ. In the Book of Romans, Paul develops this theme of forgiveness "in" and "through" Jesus (**Romans 1—8**). The Book of Romans is but an enlargement of this parable of the unmerciful servant in **Matthew 18**. In Romans, one witnesses God's forgiveness "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. God in His mercy makes salvation available through faith in His Son. Before analyzing Paul's words in Romans, this writer wishes to call attention to the words of Paul to the Ephesians as he seeks to tell the story of redemption:

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, [2] in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. [3] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. [4] But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, [5] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. [6] And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ

> Jesus. [8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:1-10**).

The Book of Romans develops this "wisdom of God." God's wisdom is unfolded in the Gospel. The Gospel reveals how God can be just and, at the same time, justify sinful men and women. What has God accomplished for sinful humanity? God in His wisdom designed a way to justify both men and women in their lost condition. Paul writes to the Corinthians about this wisdom from God:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:29-30**).

The parable in **Matthew 18** is the Gospel of God in miniature. If one understands justification, no one can refuse forgiveness to others. Biblical justification is about forgiveness. Paul focuses on biblical justification in **Romans 1:16-17.** Forgiveness with God is "without a cause" from one's own merits; forgiveness is grace in action; it is pure compassion. These two Scriptures in **Romans 1** represent the very hub of Paul's teaching on justification by faith. These two verses set forth the very heart of this Epistle—justification by faith. Paul writes: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (**1:16**). The Good News is about God's Way of salvation "in" and "through" His Son Jesus. This Gospel is God's power for the salvation of both men and women.

Thus Paul writes with equal power the following words as he seeks to draw attention to the Gospel of God: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (**1:17**). It is "in the gospel" that God reveals His method of justification. In the Greek text, Paul writes: "in it" (εψν αυψτώ', en autw), that is to say, in the Gospel. It is in this Gospel that God reveals a righteousness that comes directly from Himself. Paul expresses this truth this way: "righteousness from God (δικαιοσυψνη θεου' dikaiosunh qeou).[9] In other words, Paul is saying that this righteousness originates in God—God is its source or origin.

In **verse seventeen**, Paul zeros in on faith as the means of receiving this "righteousness from God." He says that this is "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" (εψκ πιψστεὼ ειψ̀ πιψστιν, ek pistews eis pistin). Paul is emphasizing that this "righteousness from God" *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith. In **chapters 1 and 2**, Paul paints a rather dismal picture of both Jew and Gentile—both under condemnation. In **3:23**, Paul writes: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Again, Paul writes that the Law of God shuts everyone's mouth (**3:19**). Thus Paul says, "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" (**3:20**). But Paul does not stop with this rather dismal picture of the state of humanity. He goes on to say:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (**3:21-22**).

Paul begins **3:21** with two of the greatest words in all of the English language—"But now." "But now" (ΝυνιΨ δεψ, Nuni de) reveals His way of salvation that involves a "righteousness from God," a righteousness that "comes through faith in Jesus Christ." In the new aeon (Messianic age), one is "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (**3:24**). The word *freely* in the Greek text is δωρεαψν (dwrean), which is the same word employed in **John 15:25** in which Jesus says, "They hated me without reason." The phrase "without reason" is the Greek word dwrean, which is translated in the KJV as "without a cause." Paul, in **Chapter 4** of **Romans**, illustrates "without a cause" with the story of Abraham.

In the next four chapters, Paul illustrates that freedom from God's wrath (**chapter 5**), freedom from the dominion of sin (**chapter 6**), freedom from the curse of the Law (**chapter 7**), and freedom from condemnation (**chapter 8**) are found only "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. The very end of **chapter 5**, Paul writes: "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (διαψ ψΙησου' Χριστου', dia Ihsou Cristou) [**5:21**]; in **chapter 6**, he pens: "In Christ Jesus our Lord" (εψν Χριστώ' ψΙησου', en Cristw Ihsou) [**6:23**]; in **chapter 7**, he again focuses on Christ: "Through Jesus Christ our Lord" (διαψ ψΙησου' Χριστου', dia Ihsou Cristou) [**7:25**]; and, finally, in **chapter 8**, he writes: "in Christ Jesus" (εψν Χριστώ' ψΙησου', en Cristw Ihsou) [**8:39**]. Paul alternates between "through" and "in." In these four chapters (**5—8**), Paul amplifies, as it were, **Romans 1:16-17**).

Paul explains, in this Book, the overall theme of "imputed righteousness," that is to say, righteousness credited (λογιψζομαι logizomai) to one through faith in Jesus. This is how God forgives—God credits to one His righteousness through faith in Jesus. Paul employs the word λογιψζομαι (logizomai) eleven times[10] in the fourth chapter of Romans. In the KJV, this Greek word is translated as "counted" (**4:3, 5**), "reckoned" (**4:4, 9, 10**), "imputeth" (**4:6**), and "imputed" (**4:11, 22, 23, 24**). The NIV translates this same Greek word as "credited" (**4:3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23**), "credits" (**4:6**), and "credit" (**4:24**). Paul uses Abraham to prove that God's righteousness can only be imputed, not earned. In **4:4-8**, Paul stressed that works did not justify Abraham. In **4:9-12**, he emphasized that circumcision did not justify Abraham. In **4:13-15**, he underscored the point that the Law did not justify Abraham. And, finally, in **4:16-25**, he zeros in on faith as the only means of justification.

The Jews sought a right relationship with God through law keeping. But, on the other hand, Paul states emphatically: "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited (λογιψζομαι logizomai)) as righteousness. Again, as Paul concludes his thoughts about a righteousness that is "imputed," or "credited," he writes:

The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, [24] but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. [25] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

For Paul there are only two kinds of righteousness; that is to way, one that is achieved by Law (active way of works), and one that is a gift from God by faith (a divine creation). The aim of **Romans 4** is to prove that the righteousness from God is only received by faith. As one examines Abraham, one soon discovers that the decisive thing in Abraham is his faith, or trust, in God. This imputation of righteousness is solely by and through grace. Paul calls attention to the fact that Abraham was righteous by faith before circumcision. Circumcision was only later added as a seal of his righteousness by faith. This righteousness is a gift of God. Toward the end of chapter 4, Paul's argument is that Abraham's faith is present and has reached its fulfillment in Christ's community.

As Paul examines the Messianic age, he develops the concept that a new basis of life has been brought about through Jesus Christ. In other words, with the coming of Jesus, one can stand on the ground of God's actions in and through Jesus. This is the wisdom of God in display. One cannot stand on the Law or on one's deeds, but rather, one can only stand on the ground of God's actions. The question that confronts everyone is this: Does one become righteous of himself or herself or does one become righteous through the gift of God? When one understands God's gift of forgiveness in and through Christ, one then extends forgiveness to those who sins against him or her.

CONCLUSION

Divine and human forgiveness go hand in hand. One of the major points of the parable is the contrast between the two debts—twelve million dollars versus seventeen dollars. When forgiveness takes place with God, one witnesses a miracle—a right relationship between the Creator and us. Forgiveness of sins is nothing less than sonship, that is to say, the establishment of spiritual union between God and us. One's own conscience tells him or her that since one has received forgiveness from God, then one must extend forgiveness to others. One requirement for forgiveness is that one must forgive in order to be forgiven –"Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" (**Matthew 6:12**). It is impossible for one to have a relationship with God based upon grace, and, at the same time, to have a relationship with men and women based on law.

If one wishes to share in God's mercy, then one must live with his or her neighbors, not according to law, but according to mercy. This principle is found throughout God's Word. This attitude of leniency is a vital requirement of the divine-human relationship. In this understanding of pity, one gets a glimpse into the mystery of the Gospel of God. One must always be conscious that his or her trespasses against God are greater than any trespass against any human being. Unless one appreciates pardon, one will never recognize the message of the Cross. It is in the Cross that one sees the immensity of his or her debt. Unless one is crushed, one will not see the Cross of Jesus in all its horror. Unless one is packed down, at it were, at the foot of the Cross, one will not be able to see the Cross. One belongs there, on the gallows, where Jesus hangs on account of the sins of humanity—yes, your sins and mine. One must be crucified with Christ if one expects the Cross of Christ to help him or her.

When one stands at the Cross, God stands with that person, in spite of all he or she has done. When one is crucified with Christ, God makes one a new being. If one is not renewed in God's love, his or her sins are not cancelled. For one to receive God's forgiveness means one receives God's love. Whenever one receives God's love, one

lives in God's love. When one lives in God's love, one lives in fellowship with his brothers and sisters in Christ. One meets others in love just as God meets one in love. If one's relationship with God is new, then one's relationship with his or her fellow believers will be new.

At this point, I wish to address you (second person singular) as an individual. I want this message to be personal. I want you to place yourself within this parable. What does this parable mean to you? Are you a forgiving person? Do you hold grudges? Do you seek God's forgiveness through the Cross of Jesus? Can you pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"? Are you merciful? Are you kind? Do you forgive others just as God in Christ has forgiven you? What does seventy times seven mean to you? Do you remember these words: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (**Matthew 18:35**)? Emil Brunner captures the implications of this marvelous parable of the merciful king and the unforgiving servant:

> But how can we break through to Christ. To this power and this life? There is no other way than that indicated in this parable, as in the one of the prodigal son. We must come to ourselves, arise, and go to our Father, saying, "I have sinned an am no longer worthy to be called your son" or fall on our knees before the King to implore his mercy. Where this takes place, we will understand the cross of Christ, even better, we will meet him, the crucified, to receive from his hands the judgment of our guilt, forgiveness, and his wholly incomprehensible love. It is not necessary to have first a certain theory about the cross; it is sufficient to be entirely honest with ourselves and to acknowledge our predicament in order to realize that we need both, the word of pardon and the deed of reconciliation. Then God speaks himself to us in the Word of the cross of his Christ. At the very moment we feel our need of Christ, we shall meet him and receive new life from him. May God give it to many, even to all of us. Amen.[11]

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

a Or *seventy times seven*

b That is, millions of dollars

c That is, a few dollars

† A Greek word occurs that is not directly translated in the *King James Version*.
Greek Strongs: 1161

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Greek Strongs: 1161

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Greek Strongs: 1161

[2] *The Holy Bible : King James Version.*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

[3] M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew* in Leander E. Kech, Senior Ed, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (*NIB*) Vol., VIII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 382.

[4] Warren W. Wiersbe, "Matthew" in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire "Be" Series*, Vol., 1 (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 67.

[5] J. Vernon McGee, "Matthew" in *Thru the Bible*, Vol., 4 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 101.

c pence: the Roman penny is the eighth part of an ounce, which after five shillings the ounce is seven pence halfpenny; about fourteen cents

[6] Vernon McGee, Ibid.

[7] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel, Commentary on the New Testament* (1943; reprint, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 715.

[8] Ibid.

a Or *our flesh*

b Jer. 9:24

[9] Δικαιοσυψνη θεου' (dikaiosunh qeou) can be either genitive or ablative case in Greek. The NIV translates the Greek case as ablative. The ablative case uses the same form as the Genitive. Even though both forms are the same in Greek, nevertheless, the function is different. For example, if one should read the following sentence, "The man sends the servants from the house (του' οιΣψκου tou oikou)," one observes that "from the house" is ablative, which indicates origin or source.

[10] Romans 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24.

[11] Emil Brunner, "The Merciful King and the Unforgiving Servant" in *Sowing and Reaping: The Parables of Jesus* (London: Epworth Press, 1964), 66-67. I am indebted to Brunner for his keen insight into this parable.

Identification of False Prophets In Matthew--Chapter 24

The first reason one needs to learn *how* to interpret is that, whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent.* However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.[1]

FALSE PROPHETS IN MATTHEW 24

This essay seeks to understand the context of the last two occurrences of the phrase "false prophets" as employed by Jesus. As one reads through the Matthean account, one quickly discovers that Jesus employs the phrase "false prophets" only three times. This word group only occurs four other times in the New Testament.[2] The wording is always used in reference to those who lead people away from God. This research develops a brief scenario of Jesus' confrontations with the religious leaders in **Matthew 21-23** in order to establish a background for a correct interpretation of the false prophets' texts in **Matthew 24:11, 24.**

It is significant that these two citations follow Christ's last controversy with the religious leaders (**Matthew 21:18—23:39**).[3] Since this utterance about false prophets appears frequently in our religious journals,[4] it is necessary to continue to analyze this declaration in the various contexts to see how Jesus employed the expression and to whom.[5] Of the three occurrences of this construction in Matthew, one discovers that Jesus is the only one who employs this phrase. The first mentioning of this phrase "false prophets" had reference to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The second and third occurrences of this word group are found in **chapter 24** that reveals a number of signs concerning the end of apostate Jerusalem along with its temple. This reference

to false prophets not only relates to ethical behavior but also to a denial of Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus in His description of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 warns His people against those who would appear as God's Anointed One (Christ) and claim to be true prophets. Jesus, after enumerating kingdom behavior, summarizes by saying, "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (**24:11**), and "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (**24:23-24**).

To set the stage for an accurate identification of Jesus' false prophets in **Matthew 24**, it is necessary to go back to the events leading up to Jesus' admonition. Since words do not stand alone, then one must consult the events leading up to the use of certain words in order to grasp fully the author's intended meaning. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez capture this truth and state it succinctly.

> Most of us assume that if we wish to know what a word means, a look in the dictionary will answer our question. Obviously, this is true as far as definitions are concerned. But as to what is communicated by that word, we need to look at more than the dictionary. Words do not stand alone. They are spoken by one person and addressed to another.[6]

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MATTHEW 24

The First Major Controversy

The first major controversy with the religious leaders occurs in **Matthew 9**. In this chapter, Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their "insincerity." Jesus had just performed a number of miracles (**chapter 8**): for instance, [1] He healed a man with leprosy (**8:1-4**); [2] He healed the centurion's servant (**8:5-13**); [3] He healed Peter's mother-in-law and cast out demons and healed all the sick (**8:14-17**); [4] He calmed the storm (**8:28-34**); [5] He healed two demon-possessed men (**8:28-34**); and, finally, He healed a paralytic (**9:1-2**).

As a result of these miracles, the leaders of Israel reacted negatively toward His healing ministry. Immediately following the healing of the paralytic (**9:1-2**), Jesus reacted strongly toward their inner thoughts. Matthew writes: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (**9:3**). Notice that this accusation of blasphemy was not verbalized but remained within their own evil minds. But Jesus looked into the inner recesses of their depraved minds and said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (**9:4**). For the first time in Matthew's gospel, the religious leaders and Jesus have direct contact. These controversies foreshadowed the final significant debate that Jesus had with the leaders of Israel. Jesus' ministry began with conflict and ended with conflict.

The Last Major Controversy

This last argument took place during the last week of Jesus' ministry. The following is a brief summary of the events that transpired during Jesus' final week:

- The Triumphal Entry (**21:1-11**)
- The Cleansing of the Temple (**21:12-17**)
- The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (**21:18—23:39**)
- The Olivet Discourse concerning the End of the Age (**chapters 24-25**)
- The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (**26:11-13**)
- The Arrest, Trials, and Death of Jesus (**26:14—27:66**)
- The Resurrection (**chapter 28**)

During this final week (Passion Week), the hostilities with the religious leaders escalate (**chapters 21-23**), and then they put Him to death (**chapters 26-27**). These leaders continue to see themselves as the lawful leaders of Israel and at the same time the legitimate interpreters of Scripture and the official holders of their religious heritage or traditions. **Chapter 21** narrates [1] Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (**21:1-11**), [2] Jesus at the temple (**21:12-17**), and [3] the withering of the fig tree (**21:18-22**). It was then, according to Matthew, that the chief priest and elders questioned the authority of Jesus: "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (**21:23**).

Again, as in His earlier major encounter with the religious leaders, He exposes them for their hypocrisy. To begin with, Jesus questioned them about the origin of John's baptism (**21:24-27**). In their response, they revealed their true character in the same way that they had manifested when they went out to hear John the Baptist preach in the wilderness (**3:7-10**). Prior to this last great controversy (**chapters 21-23**), Jesus had previously, according to the apostle John, brought to their attention two facts: [1] that their existence did not originate in God, and [2] that their allegiance belonged to Satan (**John 8:13, 44**). Matthew, too, records the head-on clash that led to Jesus' allegations (**Matthew 21-22**). Following the narration of this clash, Matthew gives the reaction of the religious leaders concerning Jesus' parables: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (**21:45**).[46] Matthew further informs his readers that "they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (**21:46**).

Earlier, in the beginning of His ministry, the disciples of Jesus had cautioned Jesus about His remarks against the Pharisees.

> Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (**15:12-14**).

This final controversy with the religious leaders was not something new with Jesus.[7] The climax of Jesus' ministry concludes with his final denunciation of these

false prophets. Matthew once more as he brings to an end his gospel opens this discourse of controversy with Jesus' questioning these evil leaders. For example, He interrogates these insincere men about John's baptism, as stated above, and after their refusal to answer His question about John's baptism (**21:24-27**), He responds with three parables that condemn these dishonest leaders: [1] The Parable of the Two Sons (**21:28-32**); [2] The Parable of the Tenants (**21:33-46**); and [3] The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (**22:1-11**).

The Parable of the Two Sons

> "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'" 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him (**21:28-32**).

In the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), He rebukes them for their refusal to change their minds and believe, even though they had seen God at work in Him. As one reads Matthew's narrative of the events, one cannot help but wonder if his readers did not reflect upon these same leaders in the prologue to his gospel when he wrote:

> When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel'" (**2:4-6**).

This Parable of the Two Sons is a slap-in-the-face against the false prophets in **Matthew 24**—and they knew it. Following this parable, Jesus presented another parable—The Parable of the Tenants.

The Parable of the Tenants

> Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he

> do to those tenants?" "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:" 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (**21:33-46**).

In this second parable (**21:33-46**), Jesus demonstrates that the leaders of Israel failed to meet their responsibilities to God (**21:34-36**). Even when God sent His Son, they rejected Him (**21:37-40**). With these parables, Jesus places the religious leaders in the history of rejection of God's Anointed One. God is now giving the vineyard to those who will accept Jesus (**21:41-44**). Matthew makes known to his readers that the leaders knew that these three parables were spoken against them (**21:45**). Instead of repentance, the leaders looked for a way to arrest Him (**21:46**). These leaders are the false prophets of **Matthew 24**. Once more, Jesus presented another parable to draw attention to their rejection of the One whom God sent—The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

> Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (**22:1-18**).

In this third parable (**22:1-18**), Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the religious leaders and God's kingdom. This parable is a direct rebuke against the leaders. The major themes of this parable are: [1] The king prepares a wedding banquet (**22:2**); [2] those invited find excuses not to attend and, then kill those sent with invitations (**22:3-6**); [3] the king responds by destroying their city as punishment [8] (Jesus develops this more fully in **Matthew 24**) and invites outsiders to attend (**22:8-10**); and [4] the leaders are warned that if they do not dress properly, then they will be thrown out (**22:11-14**). Over and again, Jesus nails the coffin shut on these false teachers in Matthew 24.

THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Now, four scenes follow these parables in which various combinations of the religious leaders combine their efforts to defeat and to put an end to this supposed troublemaker (**22:15-22**). The various sects combined their efforts to work together in order to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Immediately following the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, one observes the Pharisees and the Herodians in a clandestine operation to try to entrap Him. Matthew preserves this undercover operation for the extermination of Jesus.

Pharisees and Herodians

> Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away (**22:15-22**).

The first scene combines the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups schemed together to try to silence Him. They tried to lay a trap for Him over the payment of taxes to Caesar (**22:15-16**). Insincerity controls this pericope. In this showdown, Jesus calls these religious leaders hypocrites (**v. 18**). Why did He call them hypocrites? Matthew informs his readers that Jesus knew "their evil intent" (**v. 18**). In the next scene, one observes the extreme insincerity of the Sadducees in questioning Him about marital relationships after the resurrection.

Sadducees

> That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his

brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching (**22:23-33**).

The second scene embraces the Sadducees questioning Him about marriage at the resurrection (**22:23-33**)—they did not believe in the resurrection (**22:23**). They were spiritually blind in their understanding of the Scriptures (**22:29-31**); they were also spiritually blind in that they did not understand the power of God (**22:29**). Again, one recognizes an underhanded manipulation to catch Him in an entanglement that they imagined was hopeless to escape. But they failed just as their cohorts efforts also misfired in their attempt to try to get Him in hot water with the people or with the authorities. In the next episode, one looks at an expert in the law trying his hand.

A Pharisee: An Expert in the Law

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (22:34-40).

The third episode involves their efforts to entrap Him over the greatest commandment in the law (**22:34-35**). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were devious, sly, dishonest, foxy, crooked and shrewd; He knew that this question was to test Him. Thus, Jesus in response to their question also asked them a question about who Christ is.

Pharisees

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (**22:41-46**).

The fourth incident embodies the gathering together of the Pharisees. Jesus took advantage of this occasion and asked them to answer the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (**22:42**), but they refused to answer (**22:41-**

45). The religious leaders abandon their attempt to show that He posed a theological threat to their traditions through His exposition to the law. As one reflects upon the question Jesus asked the Pharisees, surely the readers of this gospel must have recalled this same question to the apostles (16:13-20). During His conflict (21:18—23:39), Jesus goes to the very heart of their problems: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (22:29).

SEVEN WOES AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL

Following this final conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus summarizes their many faults and addresses them as "hypocrites" and "blind guides" (chapter 23). In His brief explanation of the leaders, He warns His disciples to obey them, not to copy them: "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (23:3).

Matthew 23 details one of the most graphic descriptions available in all of Scripture about the decadence of Israel's leaders. Jesus issues seven woes against the religious leaders (23:13-33). Before enunciating the seven woes, He, like a bolt of lightning, goes to the very core of their corrupt nature: "Everything they do is done for men to see" (23:5).[9] The seven woes announced by Jesus are devastating to these leaders. These seven Scripture citations are included in this chapter so that the reader may follow the context of Matthew 24:11, 24 in order to ascertain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, as to whom Jesus had in mind when He spoke of false prophets. The following is His stinging condemnation of the false prophets issued in seven woes:

1. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to (23:13-14).
2. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (23:15).
3. "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it (23:16-22).
4. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (23:23-24).

5. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean (**23:25-26**).
6. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (**23:27-28**).
7. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous" (**23:29; full text is 23:29-39**).

In this conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as "blind" five times (**22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26**) and as "hypocrites" six times (**23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29**). They did not understand the important things in God's revelation. These leaders did not go for inner purity but were content with externals (**23:23, 27-28**). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on "justice, mercy and faithfulness" (**23:23**). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (**23:15**). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders' hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (**23:33**)
- Lawless (**23:23, 28**)
- Extortionist (**23:25**)
- Self-indulgent (**23:25**)
- Hypocrites (**23:28**)
- Abusive (**23:34**)
- Murderous (**23:34-35**)

Jesus' castigation of the above leaders' unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus.

> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people" (**26:3-4**) (emphasis mine).

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but

rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (**26:14-16**). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (**26:47**). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (**26:59-60**). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (**26:65-68**). Once again, while Jesus was on the cross, they mocked Him (**27:41-43**). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (**27:62-66**).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are presented in a very unfavorable light. They rejected God's point of view about His Son. They acted without authority from God. Jesus acknowledges that they have no God-given mandate to lead the children of Israel; in fact, they are children of Satan (**12:24-37**). Jesus accuses them of being of the Devil (**13:36-43; 15:12-13**). These leaders are so corrupt and evil and dishonest that they cannot recognize the power and presence of God's initiative in the history of salvation (**21:23**). Jesus held them responsible for the future destruction of Jerusalem (**22:7**). Following His seven woes, Jesus foretells the destruction of their city (**chapter 24**).[10] Is it any wonder that Jesus warned His disciples about the religious leaders in **Matthew 24**? As Matthew concludes his life of Christ, surely his readers must have reflected upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He forewarned His disciples: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**7:15**).

My objective in writing this essay is not to attack those who apply **Matthew 7:15** and **24:11, 24** to other Christians that often disagree with the "party cry" of the more than twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ. But the chief objective of this study is to help preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (**John 17**). Hopefully, this in-depth study will help individuals to focus more on the context when they want to understand the intent of the author. There is a need, I believe, to guard against interpretations that may not, in spite of all their sincerity, ring true to the Biblical revelation itself. But often, subjective interpretations and dogmatic approaches by many Christians do much to deny the very Scriptures they claim to uphold.

Leaders (preachers, elders, and editors) should be very careful about superimposing upon a text their own speculative and subjective interpretation in order to avoid the very error that Jesus condemned among the religious leaders. May God help every Christian not to apply these Scriptures (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**) to believers who hold to the use of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine, grape juice, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the treasury, Bible colleges, instrumental music, hand-clapping, solo singing in the assembly, choirs, and so on. In concluding this study on false prophets in **Matthew 7:15** and **24:11, 24**, one must again ask himself or herself the question: "How did Christ employ this stinging phrase?"

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[1] Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2d (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14.

[2] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

[3] The religious leaders go by many names—Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, scribes, and Herodians—and they form a co-operative front line against Jesus and thus can be presented as a solitary spirit. The Pharisees, Matthew 9:11,14,34; 12:2, 14, 24; 15:12; 19:3; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:26; the Sadducees, 22:23, 34; Pharisees and Sadducees, 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; the scribes, 7:29; 8:19; 9:3; 17:10; the scribes and Pharisees, 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; the chief priests, 26:14, 59; 27:6; 28:11; the elders, 15:2; the chief priest and elders, 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1, 3, 12, 20; 28:11-12; the chief priest and Pharisees, 21:45; 27:62; the chief priest and scribes, 2:4; 20:18; 21:15; the scribes and the elders, (with Caiaphas the high priest), 26:57; the elders, chief priests, and scribes, 26:21; 27:41. I am indebted to Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 241, for this collation of Scriptures. His Chapter 15, "Characters: The Religious Leaders—Opponents of God's Will" is extremely insightful (229-241). I also recommend Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), Chapter 7, "The Antagonist of Jesus," (115-127).

[4] See Chapter 2.

[5] For examples of the illegal use of this phrase in reference to Christians: see the following journals or books: Tyler Young, "Will Great Lakes Christian College Continue to Support False Teachers?" in *Contending for the Faith* 27, no. 3 (March 1996): 12-14; Steve Gibson, "Some Common Questions About False Teachers," in *The Restorer* 10, no. 11/12 (November/December 1990): 17-19; Allen Bailey, "Beware of False Teachers," in *Preacher's Study Notes* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian's Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82; Homer L. King, "Avoid Them," reprint from 1936, *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 1 (January 1996):2, 6.

[6] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 94.

[7] See also Matthew 15:1-14.

[8] Jesus develops this destruction more fully in Matthew 24.

[9] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples about external behavior performed for show. In that Sermon, Jesus discloses the same mind-set (Matthew 6:1-8) that He addresses in Matthew 23 and concludes, as is done in Matthew 24 with His warning about false prophets.

[10] For a brief explanation of Matthew 24, see Dallas Burdette, "Eschatological Judgment in Matthew 24:1—25:13" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 31 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading ESCHATOLOGY. See also Burdette, "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats," Ibid.

Judge Not

Dallas Burdette **January 30, 1999**

Thrust Statement: **God does not want His people to be hypocritical in their judgment.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:1**[1]

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord warns His people about judging others: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (**Matthew 7:1**); on the other hand, Jesus says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (**7:6**). How does one account for this apparent discrepancy? How can one determine that another person is a "dog" or "pig" if there is no judgment on the part of the person making the decision. Can one form an opinion on those who do not abide in the ethical teachings of Jesus? Is it proper to pass judgment on those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God? Can one rightly criticize someone who does not have flawless comprehension of God's Word, especially if that person's reading does not coincide with his or her explanation of the Scriptures?

This essay is concerned about those reviews of **Matthew 7:1** which are in conflict with the totality of God's Word. This paper is not examining the myth that one is never to judge one's beliefs or moral course of action,[2] but rather, the focus of this article investigates the violation practiced by many Christians in their excommunicating other believers who disagree with their exposition of Scripture. Within the Churches of Christ, perfection in understanding is often the criteria by which judgment is made as to whether a person is or is not in fellowship with a particular congregation. If one is not in communion with a certain "interpretive community," that is to say, if one is not identified with a group that has a "shared understanding," then, that person is out of friendly intercourse with God and his fellow believers. If one gives credence to

individual cups, Sunday school, instrumental music in the morning worship service (Sunday 11a.m.), "bread-breaking" versus "bread pinching" (during the communion), wine only or grape juice only, and so on, then **Matthew 7: 6** and **15** are cited to nullify **7:1**.

Matthew 7:1 is frequently violated by many God-fearing followers of Jesus by entering into a spirit of censoriousness, that is to say, picking apart or pulling down any believer who does not reach an agreement with their particular brand of orthodoxy. On the other hand, this counsel of Jesus does not preclude one from making judgements on every occasion. For example, Jesus also speaks of "righteous judgments": "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (**John 7:24**)." Following His renunciation of judgment in **Matthew 7:1**, Jesus says, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (**7:5**). Again, Jesus encourages the disciples to exercise caution against those who violate His teachings:

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (**7:15-20**).

The admonition of Jesus in **7:1** is similar in construction to other passages in the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, think about the following announcements of Jesus:

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (**6:6**).

But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (**5:39**).

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (**5:42**).

Does Jesus really mean that a person must pray in his room and "close the door"? Does Jesus teach that one cannot defend himself if someone is trying to kill him or a family member? Does Jesus inform Christians that they are never to turn someone down if they wish to borrow from them? Does Jesus mean that one is never to exercise any kind of judgment? It is obvious that Jesus employs in his teaching what is known as hyperbole, that is, bold exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Just what is Jesus teaching in **Matthew 7:1**?

It is necessary that one apply correct principles of biblical interpretation in order that one does not violate or nullify other plain teachings of Scripture. Consider, for example, the teachings of the Holy Spirit concerning judicious perception of that which is right or wrong:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Galatians 5:19-21**).

On the other hand, one observes the teachings in **Romans 14:4**: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."
Is Paul echoing, in **Romans 14:4**, the teachings of Jesus in **Matthew 7:1**? "Judge not" is inconsistently understood and plundered of its intended meaning by many well-meaning Christians in their zeal to be true to the Word of God. The most able and accomplished preachers have clashed in their explanations. One should study Jesus' language with minute attention and in the context of His phrase. The following quote summarizes the problem Christians experience in their application of Scriptures quite well: "We perceive what is 'on our mind' and not always what is presented to us."[3] It is not uncommon for individuals to confuse their understanding of God's revelation with their interpretation.

OVERALL VIEW OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew Chapter 5

It is important in one's exposition of this passage (**Matthew 7:1**) to consider the Sermon on the Mount as a whole before one attempts to exegete a particular view. First, Jesus sets forth the characteristics that exemplify His people **(5:1-9**); following the beatitudes, Jesus informs His disciples about the mistreatment of those who follow Him (**vv. 10-13**); next in order, He then makes known to them that they are "preservatives"—the glue or cement that holds society together, that is to say, "salt" and light" (**vv. 13-16**); next, Jesus calls attention to the necessity of not breaking the commandments of God (**vv. 17-20**); soon afterward, Jesus calls attention to the true interpretation of the law over against that of the religious leaders in the form of six antitheses (**vv. 21-47**). In this Sermon, Christians are taught how to behave in their walk with God and their fellowman; they are counseled that God's law is relevant for every area of one's life; and they are informed as to what it is that God demands of His people in order to praise Him.

Matthew Chapter 6

Jesus continues His discussion of the acts of piety that honors God: [1] giving to the needy (**vv. 1-4**); [2] praying in sincerity [**vv. 5-15**]; and (3) fasting as a means of enhancing one's own spiritual renewal [**vv. 16-18**]. These performances of devotion were not simply to be external accomplishments, but internal transactions. God is concerned with the heart, not just outward acts. Whatever activity one performs, he or she must do this to God's glory. Jesus warns His disciples of the perils of simply doing deeds to be seen of men. Following this exposition of true piety, Jesus admonishes His children about the hazards of worldliness, that is, the jeopardy of living for the temporal possessions of life (**vv. 19-34**).

Matthew Chapter 7

In this chapter, Jesus concentrates on relationships. His disciples are all members of God's community; therefore, His children should not sit in faultfinding, hypercritical, scrupulous, and fussy judgments (**7:1-5**). As stated above, even though Jesus issues an injunction against judging, nevertheless, this admonition is followed immediately by "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (**7:6**) and "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**7:15**). Hence, it is evident that "Do not judge" (**7:1**), in the first five verses of **chapter 7**, Jesus must have reference to judgment of His people other than discernment of those who have rejected the gospel of God.
"Do not judge" (**7:1**), is not the same judgment that Jesus speaks of in **verses 6** and **15**. The judging in **verses 6** and **15** deals with those who have spurned the ethical behavior

that Jesus calls for and the rejection of the "good news" of the Kingdom, that is, Jesus is God's way of salvation. The ones who Jesus addresses in these verses (**vv. 6 & 15**) are echoed in **Romans 2:8**: "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." **Matthew 7:1** contemplates, not those who have repudiated God, but rather, those who have acquiesced to the teachings of Jesus. Christians are not to judge their fellow believers in the sense of being censorious, faultfinding, hypercritical, or overcritical in their analysis of their spiritual welfare and of their relation to God and other Christians.

James our Lord's brother also reiterates this teaching of Jesus in his epistle:
Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (**James 4:11-12**).

To speak against a brother or sister is to scorn the law of God. It is a violation of the "royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (**2:8**) because it is the supreme law that is the source and summation of all laws governing human relationships (**Matthew 22:36-40**; **Romans 13:8-10**). James, no doubt, had in mind the words of Jesus when he wrote:
Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (**James 2:12-13**).

Paul captures the very heart of Jesus' warning in **Matthew 7:1**, when he discusses the "weak versus the strong" in his epistle to the Romans (**Romans 14** and **15).** The spirit that Paul condemns—and Jesus condemns—is that feeling of superiority, that is to say, an outlook that we are all right while others are not. It is that spirit or tendency to be sanctimonious—big "I" and little "you." There is a difference between meekness in dealing with one's imperfection in understanding and arrogance in which one takes a meat cleaver to hack one to death for honest misunderstandings. Jesus denounces censorious actions, but humility is sanctioned. It is in this vein that Paul exemplifies the commandment of Jesus ("Do not judge," **Matthew 7:1**) when he wrote his instructions to the Romans:
Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**Romans 14:1-4**).

Paul is confronting the issue of imperfection in knowledge head-on. This deformity in perception calls for toleration on the part of both parties. Within the Christian community, there are infants, there are children, there are young men, and there are old men. No one is at the same level of knowledge. None of God's children has 20/20 vision. God's people can no more all think alike than they can all look alike. God has never made absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation, if so, no one could be saved—that includes you!

Since **Matthew 7:6** and **7:15** are employed by many within the Churches of Christ to set aside Jesus' instructions in **7:1**, it is appropriate to refer to one of the founders of the Movement—Churches of Christ—who understood the implications of **Matthew 7:1**; **Romans 14 & 15**; and **James 2:12-13**; **4:11-12**). This Restoration Movement originated out of a sectarian background among the Presbyterians. Thomas Campbell, father of Alexander Campbell, had been defrocked for offering the communion to other Presbyterians not of his orthodox party. But Campbell understood the biblical principles of making allowances for one another. He had captured the essence of "Do not judge." He had grasped the reality of Christian forbearance toward those who did not comprehend the teachings of the Bible as he did. When there were doctrinal differences, he exercised humility, leniency, and moderation toward those whom he knew to be in fellowship with God. In his *Declaration and Address (*1809), he went right to the heart of attitudes that Christians should exercise with one another in dealing with differences within the Christian community. The following excerpts from the *Declaration and Address* expresses the "intent" of **Matthew 7:1**:

Proposition 6. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, so such deduction can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.[4]

Proposition 7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; wereas the Church form the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.[5]

Proposition 8. It is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge of distinct apprehensions of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church.[6]

CONCLUSION

Matthew 7:1 does not mean the refusal to practice any discrimination between right and wrong or of pronouncing "right judgment" as taught by Jesus (**John 7:24**). The best way to illustrate this "judging" is to reflect upon the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. In this Sermon, so it appears, our Lord had the Pharisees' hypocritical judgment in mind. They had misinterpreted the law; they were pretentious, boastful, braggarts in their giving to the needy, pompous in their prayers, and ostentatious in their fasting. They were object-oriented, earthly-minded, unspiritual, and greedy in their vision with regard to the material and spiritual things of this world. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**Luke 18:9-14**) is a bang-up commentary on **Matthew**

7:1. Jesus warns His disciples of this breed of behavior. May God help each person to "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:2-3**). Jesus graphically depicts the kind of judging He prohibits in the Sermon on the Mount with the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (**Luke 18:9-14**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] The Sermon on the Mount addresses beliefs and ethical behavior that is not in keeping with the commandments of God. Everyone must stress holiness as a way of life—there is no middle of the road. Having said this, it is imperative that Christians do not identify the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount with their particular brand of orthodoxy, depending on which of the twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, that they are pigeonholed with. It is not uncommon for sincere Christians to describe their "interpretive community" as bearer of all truth.

[3] John C. Condon, *Semantics and Communication* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 17.

[4] Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri, 1985), 110.

[5] Ibid., 110, 111.

[6] Ibid., 111.

Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew

> Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.[1]

LITERARY CRITICISM

This essay details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to understand more clearly as to whom the false prophets are that Jesus warns His disciples about. The phrase "false prophet" is employed from Matthew's Gospel in order to justify separation from other believers when viewpoints do not often agree. To accomplish this objective of identification of the false prophets, then literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist one in identifying the false prophets in the three different occurrences of the phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. This study draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by the God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This critical analysis reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

Since God's revelation is given in story form to His people, this form of communication enables them to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets

in the Gospel of Matthew. One can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot for an accurate description of the misleading instructors.[2] This detailed study is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. This literary exploration explores the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.[3]

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole. The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew[4] can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. Hayes and Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units."[5] When the reader posses questions about the literary placement of certain passages, he/she is able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps one to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists one in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.[6] He points out justly so that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."[7] Again, Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."[8] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text.[9] The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*[10] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. But, on the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.[11] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself."[12] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.[13] This chapter (4) is a narrative construction of Matthew's gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As one begins to read the narrative penned by Matthew, one is immediately made aware that there is a plot. Whenever one has a plot, one has a story.[14] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.[15] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.[16] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by

demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and birth to death and resurrection."[17] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."[18] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.[19] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."[20] This arrangement of events is self-evident when one looks at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.[21] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story; in other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen one's understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

> The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice of arrangement (the order of happening) in presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.[22]

One cannot read Matthew's story[23] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (**1:1—4:16**); next, he describes indirect collision (**4:17—11:1**); then he pictures direct confrontation (**11:2—16:20**); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (**16:21—28:20**). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.[24]

In the development of plot, one recognizes the translating of characters into action.[25] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus.[26] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot.[27]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, one is immediately confronted with various evaluative points of view about the identity of Jesus.[28] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell.[29] There is a contrast in the book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. One also observes other points of view concerning the crowds. If one's point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in **Matthew 3:17** and **17:5**, then that individual is not thinking the things of God, but rather the things of men (**16:23**).[30]

As one peruses the book of Matthew, one cannot help but observe various points-of-view about Jesus?[31] One encounters Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (**chapters 1 and 2**). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus.[32] Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, one is confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

As one moves from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, one observes the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of the disciples did not think the things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men'" (**16:23**). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God's purpose for the salvation of mankind through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the various view points set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters' point of view coincides with that of God's. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew's history of salvation. This chapter will reveal that the religious leaders' point of view was in direct opposition to God's point of view. This rejection of God's point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew's gospel.[33] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus' identity [**1:1—4:16**];[34] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's repudiation of Jesus [**4:17—16:20**];[35] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [**16:21—28:20**].[36] It appears that Matthew employs a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment

one: "From that time on Jesus began to preach" (**4:17**) and with the beginning of section three: "From that time on Jesus began to explain" (**16:21**). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.[37]

It seems appropriate to analyze the book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist one in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As the reader advances through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows[38] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in **7:15**. In Part Two (**4:17—16:20**) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (**16:21—28:20**) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (**26:57-67; 27:32-55**).[39]

FIRST MAJOR SECTION: 1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to "present Jesus to the reader so that he/she will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is."[40] As one approaches this first section (**1:1—4:16**), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of **1:1—4:16.** For instance, the formula quotation in **Matthew 2:23** is linked to the formula quotation in **4:12-16** through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- "And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

- "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

Again, **Matthew** (**2:15**) informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- "Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

These three citations (**2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15**) along with the baptismal declaration (**3:17**) declare the unity of **1:1—4:16**. The baptismal declaration reads: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This passage (**3:17**) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in **2:15**. Also, **4:12-16** is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in **2:23**. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (**1:1—4:16**) also foreshadows the false prophets

that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God's Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew unveils Jesus' identity. In this division, one finds the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew's story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased.[41] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For one to trace properly the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, one must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God's evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

Matthew's Evaluative Point of View

Matthew's point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God.[42] For example, in the prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (**1:21-23**).

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (**Isaiah 7:14**). This reference also discloses God's hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful man. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (**Matthew 1:1-17**). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel's history in the promises He made to Abraham (**Genesis 17:1-9**)[43] and David (**Isaiah 11:1**). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (**Matthew 1:12**) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (**1:1**). It is also significant that in this genealogy that Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (**1:1, 21**) also makes known God's point of view as well as Matthew's point of view.

The name Jesus is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the personal name of the Messiah as Jesus (**1:16**), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (**1:20-21**). Matthew chronicles Joseph's response to the angel: "He gave him the name Jesus" (**1:25**). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, one discovers that God is active in Him for the salvation of mankind. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in **1:1** that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (**16:16**)—but also that he is "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham."

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (**1:1—4:16**) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ's rejection of Israel's leaders by recording Pilate's question to the chief priest and elders (**27:20**): '"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked" (**27:22**). Even the high priest in Jesus' final hours asked Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (**26:63**). Did Jesus refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: "Crucify him!" (**27:22**).

The Magi's Evaluative Point of View About Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is born "born King of the Jews" (**2:2**). This phrase, "king of the Jews," sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus' identity.[44] In fact, the rest of **2:2** reads: "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Immediately, in Matthew's story, one quickly observes the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi's evaluative point of view is in harmony with God's evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (**27:37**).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the "king of the Jews." Matthew records Pilate's question and Jesus' answer: "Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied" (**27:11**). Jesus response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus' crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (**27:37**).

Herod and the Religious Leaders' Point of View

Herod's evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God's. To illustrate Herod's point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew's prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him" (**2:13**). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the "chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law" (2:4) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: '"In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written'" (**2:5**). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns his disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**16:21**).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus' prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (**17:22-23**). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (**20:17-19**).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in **7:15** and **24:11,24**) in their final outrage against Him.

> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (**27:41-44**).

"He saved others" is reflective of **1:21**; "He's the King of Israel" is reflective of **2:2**; and "I am the Son of God" is reflective of **3:17**. The chief priest, the teachers of the law, nor the elders had the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist's Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist's evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (**Matthew 3:7-12**).[45] For example, Matthew captures John's graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:11-12**). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God's evaluative point of view.

Satan's Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (**4:3**).[46]

- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down" (**4:5-6**).

Satan expresses God's point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God's point of view about Jesus' purpose in coming (**4:1-11**). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (**16:21-23**).

Peter's Evaluative Point of View

Peter's evaluation of Jesus in **16:13-20** reflects God's evaluative point of view in **3:17**. Matthew highlights God's point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew's introduction—"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" [**3:13**]—one observes a dialogue between John and Jesus **(3:14-15**) and two revelatory events that follow (**3:16-17**). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan (**4:1-11**). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God's way of redemption. Later in Matthew's story (**16:21—28:20**) when Peter tried to prevent the atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (**4:1-12**).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Following this confession Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in

heaven" (**16:17**). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (**3:17**). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: "'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (**17:5**).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION: 4:17—16:20

Following Matthew's introduction to Jesus as Messiah (**1:1—4:16**), he embarks upon Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel (**4:17—11:1**).[47] Matthew calls attention to Jesus' ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (**4:17**). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (**9:36**). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (**12:34**). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (**3:7-8**).

JESUS' MINISTRY TO ISRAEL: 4:17—11:1

Jesus' Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus' ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (**5:20**), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the gospel (**4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). After Jesus learns of John's imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (**4:12**). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (**4:12-13**). During this period of time, He proclaims the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near (**4:17**). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (**4:18-20**); shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (**4:21-22**). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see **chapters 8 and 9**), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (**9:9-13**). Then, in chapter 10, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (**10:1-4**).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee "Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in **9:35** and **11:1**. The third summary of Jesus' ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (**4:25**). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (**4:24**), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him (**4:24-25**).

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (**5:1—7:28**). If one wants to understand what He taught (**4:23**), then one must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (**5:17-20**). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**7:28-29**). Just as in the first section of Matthew's story (**1:1—4:16**), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until **chapter 12**.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (**5:10-13**) whom He later described as false prophets (**7:15**). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**). This statement by Jesus echoes John's renunciation of the Pharisees (**3:7**) and the complicity of the teachers of the law with Herod (**2:4**).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (**5:21-48**) and acts of piety (**6:1-18**). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (**5:21a**), "But I tell you" (**5:22**). Jesus is not contradicting the law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the law. He is not nullifying the law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of

the law. If Jesus is abolishing the law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus' earlier statement:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**5:17-19**).[48]

Jesus' Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus' ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (**8:1—9:38**). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew's readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (**1:1—4:16**) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (**5:10-12**). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (**chapters 8 and 9** record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (**8:1-4**), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (**8:5-13**), cures Peter's mother-in-law (**8:14-15**), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (**8:16-17**). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle, namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (**8:23-27**). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (**8:28-34**).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (**9:1**). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (**9:2a**). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (**9:2b**). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the law. Again, one is reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**7:15**). These teachers of the law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (**9:3**). Suddenly in this ninth chapter, one witnesses conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, one should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

> "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men (**9:4-8**).

Not only does the second section (**4:17—16:20**) of Part One (**4:17-11:1**) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (**10:7-8**). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in **Chapter 10**, one beholds bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this **chapter (10)**, Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (**10:16**). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (**10:17**). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (**5:10-12**).

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). In **4:17**, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is through this proclamation that Jews and Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God's gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God's kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan's Rules?

What does the "kingdom of heaven" mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, "the kingdom of heaven is near" (**3:2**), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, 'God with us'" (**1:23**). And in **12:28**, Matthew states Jesus' announcement: "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the good news about God's way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his

people from their sins" (**1:21**). The gospel is simply good news about God's way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this good news in a conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**John 3:16-21**).

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate **4:17—11:1** (part "A") as it does in **11:2—16:20** (part "B"). Part "A" of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders; in part "A" the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (**9:1-8**). In this first section, one is led to count on battle. In **4:17—8:34** Matthew forewarns the reader that he is to anticipate conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (**5:10-12**), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (**5:20**).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (**6:1-18**). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders' motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**7:28-29**). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (**8:5-10**) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (**8:11-12**).

Now in Chapter 9, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized; it is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of a paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" (**9:3**). They declare "to themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and

sinners in Matthew's home (**9:9-10**). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (**9:11**).

In **Chapter 10**, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (**10:1-15**). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (**10:16-39**). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**), now Jesus warns them about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach and to heal (**10:7,8,16**).[49]

In the first major section (**4:1—4:16**), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (**3:17**). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's point of view that Jesus is His Son (**3:17**) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (**4:3, 6**).[50] The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (**2:1-6**), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist who is supportive of Jesus (**3:7-12**).[51] In this first section, one comes away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, one, upon a closer reading, immediately grasps that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (**2:3-6**). Also one immediately grasps Jesus' eschatological judgment (**Matthew 24 and 25**) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:7-12**).

As stated above, the second major section (**4:17—16:20**) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (**4:17—11:1** and **11:2—16:20**). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**), rather than on the element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (**4:17**). But in this second section (**11:2—16:20**) of the second major division (**4:17—16:20**), one observes Jesus' anguish of Israel's

negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (**11:16-19**). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, one should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1:--16:20

In part "B" of the second major section, the leaders' threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (**12:14**). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in **9:3**. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew's story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders' hostilities are no longer secretive (**9:1-8**), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation over the disciples' picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (**12:2-8**). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (**12:9**) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (**12:10**). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10	Matthew 12:38
Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"	Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2	Matthew 15:1-2
When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."	Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

In this second subdivision (part B), one observes the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in **12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9**. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (**12:14**). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (**12:22-37, 38-45**). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub Matthew 12:36-37	The Sign of Jonah Matthew 12:41-42

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.	The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in **Matthew 24 and 25**. This judgment is the same "coming wrath" that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (**3:7-12**): "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:12**). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (**13:36-43**):

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (**13:40-43**).

As stated above, the religious leaders' opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in **Matthew 12**, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (**12:14**). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are "evil" (**12:23, 39, 45; 16:4**), spiritually blind (**12:24, 38, 42; 16:3**), hypocritical (**12:10; 15:7; 16:10**), conniving (**12:14**), murderous (**12:14**), unfaithful to God (**12:39; 16:4**), unrepentant (**12:41**), and lawless (**15:3, 6**). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (**12:43-45**); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (**12:38; 16:1**). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (**4:17—16:20**), part B (**11:2—16:20**), one witnesses the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- **12:1-8** Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- **12:9-14** Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- **12:22-37** Healing Blind and Dumb Demoniac
- **12:38-45** Demand for a Sign

- **15:1-20** Eating with Defiled Hands
- **16:1-4** Second Demand for a Sign
- **16:5-12** The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus' ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major section (**1:1—4:16**), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:17**).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in **11:2—16:20** is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (**11:2-3**). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (**12:22-23**).

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in **1:1—4:16**. But in this second part, one is also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (**4:1—4:16**), as well as in part two (**4:17—16:20**), breaks into the world of Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (**3:17; 17:5**). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater detail, the third section (**16:21—28:20**). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about who the Son of Man is (**16:13**).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (**4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1**). But in spite all of this fame, one still observes conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (**4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (**9:3, 11, 34**). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (**11:2—12:50**). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (**2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42**). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (**11:16-19**). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (**11:20-21**), and Capernaum (**11:23-24**) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of

Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: "'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him" (**13:55-57a**).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (**14:1-2**). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (**14:3-11**). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (**14:24-33**), they all proclaimed: "Truly you are the Son of God." (**14:33**). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (**8:27**). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (**16:13-20**): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Peter's point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God's point of view (**3:17; 16:23a**). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (**16:13-14**).

In the second part (**4:17—16:20**), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (**4:17—11:1**) and of Israel's response to Him (**11:2—16:20**). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God's end-time rule (**5:1—8:1**). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (**9:3**). This section consists mainly of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**).

In the later part of Matthew's story, one observes a change (**11:2—16:20**). To all intents and purposes, Jesus' ministry is without success. In fact, Israel's response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (**12:1—8, 9—14; 15:1-9**). The leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (**9:34; 12:24**). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (**16:13-14**).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (**16:16; 14:33**). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence; they do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus' ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. But, on the other hand, His ministry, in the

sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION: 16:21—28:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus' prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**Matthew 16:21**). One observes that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary ("he must go" or "it is necessary," dei`). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (**1:21**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders' objective is destruction (**12:14**). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Prior to these predictions, one recalls Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (**16:16**). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples "not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (**17:9**).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (**16:22**). Peter still did not understand the atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (**4:10**). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, one finds three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:17**). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (**17:5**). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (**16:21**), but Peter says "no" (**16:22**). But on the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (**17:22-23**). One can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (**17:9**). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-48**).

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (**Matthew 20:17**). He took the disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (**20:18-19**).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (**21:1**). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (**21:9**). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to who this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (**21:11**). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (**21:13**). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (**21:12-13**). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (**21:12—23:39**).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (**21:15**)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (**21:23**)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (**22:15-16**)
- The Sadducees (**22:23**)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (**22:24-35**)

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

> "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions (**22:42-46**)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (**chapter 23**). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (**chapter 24**). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (**chapter 25**).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (**26:1-5**). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (**3:17; 17:5**). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (**26:1**). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as to what His death is all about: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**26:27-28**). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (**26:57-67**), before Pilate (**27:11-26**), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (**27:27-31**). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (**27:32-44**), the death of Jesus (**27:45-55**), the burial of Jesus (**27:57-66**), the resurrection of Jesus (**28:1-10**), the guards' report (**28:11-15**), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (**28:16-20**).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew's Gospel (**16:21-28:20**) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with **Matthew 16:21**, one observes an escalation of the "powers that be" to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (**27:20**). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to "Watch out for false prophets" (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**). The first warning followed Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders' theology (**Matthew 5—6**) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (**Matthew 23**) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

This essay has analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (**4:1—1:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21—28:20**) of Matthew's gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, one observes that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, one observes direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders' concept of God's righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders' characteristics (**chapter 24 and 25**). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A one observes, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B one observes an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section (**16:21—28:20**), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

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[1] Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

[2] See Ronald David Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

> Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks at a text, rather than through it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

[3] Ibid., 95.

[4] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[5] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

[6] Powell, *Criticism, 1-10.*

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Chapter 2, "The Crisis and Identification of False Prophets Within the Churches of Christ," for examples of not applying the principles of literary analysis in seeking to comprehend the false prophets passages. And, as a result of this loose interpretation, each division within the Churches of Christ claims the false prophets citations as their own exclusive ticket to defend their separation from other Christians.

[10] See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

> Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

[11] An example of this distinction is found in my article on The Passover Traditions in the First Century—where the *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knows about the Passover traditions in the first century [ON-LINE—available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 30 January 2001), located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, and then under the subheading LORD'S SUPPER. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

[12] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The

Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

[13] See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

> Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[14] See Witherup, " Cross of Jesus," 120, 139.

[15] Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story,* 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See also Bauer, "The Cross of Jesus," 62.

[20] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[21] Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[22] Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Plot" in *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

[23] See Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: "This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place).

[24] Forster, Novel, 86.

[25] See Bauer, "Structure," 26, where he comments on "plot":

> Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the "plot." Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[26] See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, 168.

[27] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[28] Ibid., 34.

[29] Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, "Discourse," 67.

[30] For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, S*tory,* 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph., D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[31] See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[32] Powell, "Leaders," 184.

[33] I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story*, for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[34] Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[35] This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17—11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2—16:20]; Witherup, The Cross of Jesus, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[36] Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[37] For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[38] Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[39] Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

[40] Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[41] For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

[42] See Kingsbury, *Story,* 35.

[43] "When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God'" (**Genesis 17:1-8**).

[44] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

[45] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[46] In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by ***ei*** ("if") with the indicative mood in the protasis (if clause) and almost any mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with ***ei*** ("if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with ***ean*** ("if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis (if clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God. . . ."

[47] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

[48] For a detailed study of the Old Testament and its relevance, see Dallas Burdette, "The Authority of the Old Testament: A Brief Summary of the Relevance of the Old Testament within the Christian Community" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[49] Jack Dean Kingsbury, ***Story***,

[50] Powell, "Leaders," 217.

[51] Ibid.

Starving for Righteousness

Thrust Statement: **God's wants His people to crave His righteousness.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:1-16; Luke 10:38-42**

This message begins with the fourth beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. In this beatitude, Jesus says, "Blessed (μακαψριοι makarioi) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (δικαιοσυψνη diakaiosunh), for they will be filled" (**Matthew 5:6**).[1] The words *hunger* and *thirst* convey different mental images to different individuals. What does it mean to "hunger and thirst for righteousness"? Does the word *starve* ring a bell in your thinking? What does it denote to you to starve for righteousness? When a person is famished that person is starving. Do you yearn for the things of God? This hunger and thirst that Jesus speaks of is spiritualized. A classic example of this kind of "longing" is found in Mary's attitude of devotion as she listened to the words of Jesus:

> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (**Luke 10:38-42**).

FAMINE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The words *hunger and thirst* in the Greek text are both participles. The participles are durative present tenses (πεινω'τë καιΨ δΐω'τë peinwtes kai diywtes), which means that this hungering and thirsting is continuous. In the ancient world, physical hunger and thirst threatened both man and beast. In 436 BC, famine came to Rome and caused thousands of people to throw themselves into the Tiber River and end their lives. Just a brief history of the world reveals the severity of famine that has plagued the world and still plagues the world. Famine struck England in AD 1005. In fact, all Europe suffered a famine in 879, 1016, and 1162. Today, even with great technological advances, one still witnesses starvation. Unfortunately, the physical hunger of men and women is only a pale reflection of a far more serious famine that affects the world as a whole—a spiritual hunger and thirst for the Word of God and for the acts of goodness that reflect God's goodness.

TEMPTATION OF JESUS

One catches a brief glance of this kind of famine in the words of Jesus to Satan: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (**Matthew 4:4**). "It is written" (γεψγραπται gegraptai) is a perfect tense ("it has been written"), which simply means: "and once written, now stands forever." This confrontation occurred in the context of Jesus' fast for forty days and nights—"He was afterward an hungered" (KJV, **4:3**). Following this period without food, Satan approaches Jesus about turning stones into bread (**4:3**). Jesus' response should penetrate the hearts of His people. For Jesus, there is a hunger of the heart that is not in material things. The only way for one to experience true satisfaction in life is through complete dependence on God. This attitude of absolute trust in God can best be expressed in the words of Job after he experienced the loss of his family: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (**Job 1:21c**). In this same Scripture, Job cries out: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart" (**1:21b**).

RIGHTEOUSNESS==DOING THE WILL OF GOD

To return again to **Matthew 5:6**, one should take note that this craving that Jesus speaks of is for a "righteousness" (δικαιοσυψνη dikaiosunh) that pleases God, not just man. God is concerned about the external behavior of His people as well as the motive behind the action. The word *righteousness* in the Sermon on the Mount is employed with the primary meaning of actively doing the will of God (**6:1-18**). This concept is also presented in **6:33**: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (dikaiosunh), and all these things will be given to you as well." The primary meaning of "righteousness" in this verse is not God's act in and through Jesus (imputed righteousness), but rather, it is the disciples' act in doing the will of God in their daily walk with Him. Toward the end of this Sermon, Jesus speaks of "doing the will of my Father" (ποιε'ν τοΨ θεψλημα του' Πατροψ poien to qelhma tou Patros) [**7:21**]. What is the "will of my Father"? The Sermon on the Mount reveals the will of God. The "will of God" must be interpreted in light of its context. The will of God is not necessarily a timeless reality but one that is related to the situation. Righteousness is always what corresponds to the will of God.

Jesus is concerned about haughtiness (**6:3-5**); He is concerned about external and internal behavior (**6:1**); He is concerned about forgiveness (**6:12**); He is concerned about loving one another (**5:43-48**); He is concerned about hyper-critical judging (**7:1-2**); He is concerned about bearing good fruit (**7:15-23**); and He is concerned about the kind of foundation upon which you build your life (**7:24-27**). Jesus is saying that His people can have only one priority in God's kingdom—doing the will of God. This same impression of righteousness is taught also in the so-called Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**. In this prayer, Jesus expresses the necessity of doing God's will on earth as it is done in heaven (**6:10**).

God has made us for Himself, and our hearts will not find rest until they find rest in God. Just as a starving person longs for food and thirsts for water, so one who wishes to satisfy the inner longings of his or her soul can only find his or her satisfaction in God through Christ (**11:28**). This hunger for righteousness is a spiritual hunger that can only be fulfilled by God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though this righteousness in **Matthew 5:6** has to do with sanctification, nevertheless, one can also say that one should also hunger and thirst for the righteousness that God imputes to individuals who put their trust in Jesus. This hunger and thirst that Jesus speaks of is a desire to please God by living in a way that will bring honor and praise to the One who created us for His pleasure. This craving for righteousness is a yearning for a holy way of life—a life of purity. In other words, it is a wish to be like Jesus. This kind of person is the one who desires to produce the fruit of the Spirit in his or her life (**Galatians 5:19-26**). The author of Hebrews expresses it this way:

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. [16] And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (**Hebrews 13:15-16**).

This beatitude calls for zeal on the part of every believer to be like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The person who hungers and thirst after righteousness is the person who wishes to get rid of sin in his or her life. It is a desire to get rid of sin in order that one might exemplify Christ. The words of the Psalmist capture graphically the thought of the words of Jesus: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. [2] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (**Psalm 42:1-2**). Paul, too, grabs hold of the very heart of this Beatitude when he writes: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**Philippians 1:21**). Paul is saying in essence, "I surrender to Jesus Christ." Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Matthew utilizes this term *righteousness* seven times in his Gospel, of which five are in the Sermon on the Mount. This righteousness is the righteousness of people who are in harmony with the "will of God." If one wishes to enter the kingdom of heaven (βασιλειψα τω'ν ουΣρανω'ν basileia twn ouranwn), one must adhere to the ethical demands of God from a pure motive, that is to say, one's righteous acts must be done to glorify God, not to receive praise from men. The "pure in heart" (καθαροιΨ τή' καρδιψά kaqaroiV th kardiá) is the one who has a good conscience and harbors no

evil intention. This beatitude is for the active behavior of people whose hearts are filled with praise for God's mercy. After the conclusion of the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks of His followers as salt and light to the world (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

The purpose of engaging in acts of righteousness is not for show but for the glory of God. Jesus says, "that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (**5:16**). One's attitude in the performance of good works is crucial to God. Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for their acts of righteousness (**6:1-18**). One should never carry out his or her acts of righteousness with an eye on the human grandstand of applause. Are you hungry for "the will of God" (τοΨ θεψλημα του' θεου' to qelhma tou qeou, see **Mark 3:35**)? Do the words *hunger* and *thirst* employed by Jesus in the beatitudes communicate to you an intense desire for the things of God? Do you crave for features, or characteristics, that will bring honor and glory unto the One who sent His Son to reconcile you to Himself? Do your actions adorn the Word of God?

Again, what do the words *hunger* and *thirst* suggest to your mental image? Does the word *starve* jump out like neon lights flashing on some billboard? One may go to a dictionary and try to assign definitions to the words *starve*, *hunger*, or *thirst*, but the dictionary cannot define adequately these words that describes human misery and experience. Just what does it mean to "hunger" and "thirst" after "righteousness"?

Why do you do what you do in your Christian life? Are your religious acts done to receive glory from men and women? Or do you do your religious acts to glorify God? Jesus warned His disciples: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness (δικαιοσυψνη dikaiosunh) surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 5:19**). Not only were His disciples called to a standard of right living, but they were also informed of a greater righteousness by calling attention to a new interpretational structure of God's Word, that is to say, a correct handling of God's Word. In **Matthew 5:21-48**, Jesus analyses the hypocritical manner of the religious leaders handling the Holy Scriptures that violated the very intent of God. Following this pericope (unit of Scripture), Jesus then calls attention to three acts of righteousness—giving, praying, and fasting (**6:1-18**)—done for the wrong reason.

Matthew 6:1 begins with notification that one's acts of righteousness must not be in front of men in order to be seen by them: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' (dikaiosunh) before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." Again, Jesus says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (dikaiosunh), and all these things will be given to you as well" (**6:33**). What do you seek first? Is it the works of the flesh or is it God's kingdom and His ethical instructions for holy living? One must never forget the end of this Sermon: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (**7:21**). What is the "will of my Father"? **Matthew 5—7** defines the "will of God" in **7:21**. God's answer to the human dilemma of spiritual starvation is a spiritual longing for the things of God first in one's life. Do you put the righteousness of God foremost in your life? Christians must hunger and thirst after God's righteousness. The words of the author of Hebrews warns against refusing God:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. [15] See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. [16] See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. [17] Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears (**Hebrews 12:14-17**).

ULTIMATE RIGHTEOUSNESS: RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Needless to say, the ultimate righteousness of God is that which is "imputed" (credited) to man through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Do you desire the absolute and perfect righteousness of God? If so, this can only be achieved "in and through" Jesus Christ. Do you feel that you are a miserable failure in your attempts to manifest deeds that bring glory to God? There is in every one of us an instinctive desire to do well, but, at the same time, we frequently fail. This Beatitude (**5:6**) blesses not only the deed, but also the dream that never came true. It is not he or she who has attained righteousness who is called blessed, but rather he or she who hungers and thirsts for it with all of his or her heart. If this blessedness were only for those who had achieved perfection in their desire to serve God, then it would be for none. It is for those who hunger after excellence in doing the will of God. Yes, it is for those who covet faultlessness in doing the will of God.

Surely there is a difference between the secret splendor of intentions and the poverty of our achievements. To illustrate still further the truth set forth in this beatitude, one only has to reflect upon this statement: "One may be passionately in love with music, but a bad musician." Yes, man sees the deed, but God sees the intention. God sees the desire and love for goodness that lies behind the miserable failures found frequently in our lives. This was also true of David (a man after God's own heart). David wished to build a house for God, but God would not allow David to construct such a house. Was God pleased with David even though He would not give David permission? Listen to the following words of Solomon as he expresses God's delight about his father's motives: "But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart'" (**1 Kings 8:18**).

CONCLUSION

There is a sense in which this Beatitude drives one to Christ, the Savior of the world. As one seeks to achieve perfection in one's acts of righteousness, the eye of the soul is turned away from self to Jesus. For in the words of Paul, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). I suspect that all of us who have gathered here in this assembly desire to please Him in all things. Yet, we all know that we have all failed miserably in our attempts to do the will of God in our daily walk with Him. The beauty of this Beatitude is that it is for those who genuinely hunger and thirst after righteousness, not just the achievers. As stated above, this "righteousness"

designates the righteousness of the people. This "righteousness" designates an active, energetic longing, and a decisive effort toward the realization of righteousness.

Upon whom does Christ pronounce the benediction "blessed"? It is to those who hunger and thirst after His righteousness. This beatitude urges a decisive ethical initiative on the part of every believer. This "righteousness" is the righteousness of forbearance, of mercy, of purity, of peacemaking, of forgiveness, of love, and of sincerity. Do you wish to be holy? Do you have an insatiable appetite for ethical behavior that will bring honor and glory to God? The one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is not one who is passive about doing the things of God. This pronouncement of "blessed" (μακαψριϋ makarios) is not for passivity, but rather for the active behavior of His disciples.

The three preceding beatitudes set the stage for one to hunger and thirst after God's way of righteousness (**Matthew 5:3-5**). If one is not bankrupt (πτωχοιψ ptwcoi "poor") in spirit (**5:3**), if one does not mourn because of his or her sin (**5:4**), and if one is not meek (**5:5**), this person will not hunger and thirst after righteousness. These beatitudes are "entrance requirements" into the kingdom of Heaven. Those who mourn over their failures and those who yearn for conformity to Christ are the ones accepted of God in Christ Jesus. Is there any hope for us in spite of our shortcomings? Yes, Jesus is the answer to the sin problem. Listen to Paul as he seeks to give the Christians at Rome hope:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. [29] Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, [30] since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. [31] Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (**Romans 3:21-31**).

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[1] All citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

The Churches of Christ and Their Identification of False Prophets

Thrust Statement: **Misunderstanding of the Word of God does not, in and of itself, constitute one a false prophet.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 2 John 9**

> One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything which was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of the church made it difficult, if not impossible to read the Bible correctly.[1]

PRESENT CRISIS WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Tradition is still making it difficult for Christians to read the Bible correctly. As a result of the foothold that custom has within many Churches of Christ, the churches as a whole are hopelessly divided over opinions. These divisions are deep and wide. Issues are so hotly debated that for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is to call down upon his/her head the epithet—false teacher. The lines of demarcation are tearing this denomination[2] into many warring factions. The heart of all the confusion is over pattern theology, which focuses on the methodology of how to conduct a worship service on Sunday morning with its five-acts. Each group

basically has its own agenda.[3] This essay is a brief summary of the conflict within the Churches of Christ in its identification of false prophets in Matthew's Gospel.

Country-wide Dissension

The Churches of Christ today are experiencing change that is causing some churches to level the harmful charge of false prophets against those who turn aside from long defended cherished traditions (traditionalism). Again, as in the Reformation, one's heritage has made it difficult to interpret the written word accurately. Traditions are often equated with the Word of God itself. Leroy Garrett points out that

> People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[4]

Many Christians can no longer distinguish between the interpretation of the interpretative community and the Word of God itself. It is in this vein of orthodoxy that Stafford North, associated with Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts, forewarns against change, but this, too, is based upon his own interpretative community.[5] North points out in defense of his position that "Paul, John, Jesus and others in the New Testament forbid anyone to change or vary from this teaching. Jesus warned of false teachers and spoke of those in judgment who thought they were His but would be turned away because he 'never knew them'" (**Matthew 7:15-20**).[6]

North cites many Scriptures to justify his negative position of turnabout within the Churches of Christ. But upon closer analysis of the Scriptures he cites, the evidence does not appear to support his judgment of indictment. No one denies the Scriptures he relies upon to teach that one should not depart from the teachings of Jesus, but rather many Evangelical believers reject his application of those Scriptures to maintain the status quo within his interpretative community.

Each interpretative community advances its own brand of orthodoxy. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one postulating its own trademark of conformity. The history of the Churches of Christ is riddled with conflict and division over peripheral issues. It is in this same vein of disharmony within the Churches of Christ that Richard H. Niebuhr addresses the subject of hostility within Christendom itself. He is correct when he pungently captures the very essence of exclusiveness through teaching the history of the church.

> The teaching of church history is sometimes made the occasion for developing a sense of alienation from other groups rather than for developing a sense of unity. Like every other history, it is used at times to promote indoctrination in a peculiar tenet. Yet fundamentally and generally it is taught as church history.[7]

This alienation reached a climax for some within the Churches of Christ in the 1960s. In 1966, for instance, seventeen men and women voiced their concern for change within the Churches of Christ.[8] The concern of these Christians shook the establishment and reverberated throughout the Churches of Christ with fear of the unknown. Many were coming out of Plato's cave.[9] They were no longer seeing shadows, but they were seeing reality. Robert Myers in analyzing the tension build-up writes in his "Introduction" the following scenario that describes the purpose of the book:

> Some of us within the Church of Christ segment of the Restoration movement, and some recently out of it, have felt it imperative to analyze its failures. This anthology of essays is a criticism of a religious way of life. It is written by men who have remained within the Church of Christ, or by those who have felt they had to seek wider fellowship but still love dearly the people they left behind.[10]

Since the publication of *Voices of Concern*, many leaders have repudiated the narrow-mindedness within many Churches of Christ. And, as a result of rethinking ritualistic worship positions (five acts) once held, many are now advancing the concept that God has not ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts and also that God has a larger fellowship than just those within the Churches of Christ.[11] Thus, crises exist within the churches, and this call for change is working havoc among those who seek to stifle variation in the so-called worship service. But for those seeking more freedom in their gatherings, they often suffer ostracism by other Christians.[12] Neal Pryor, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Bible at Harding University, is correct when he writes: "There is hardly a congregation in our brotherhood that is not feeling the pressure for change. This trend can be a great benefit in that it calls us to re-examine what is really essential for us to keep and what are traditions that can and perhaps should be changed."[13]

Curtis Cates, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching and co-editor of *Yokefellow*, laments the fact that many within the Churches of Christ are no longer "set courageously for the defense of the Truth."[14] Again, he says, "Liberalism is an enemy of the light of God's Word, the absolute and knowable Truth (2 Tim. 3:14-17)."[15] He then identifies two men (Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris) within the Churches of Christ as associated with "the liberal, modernistic human philosophies"[16] These two men published a book to call attention to many of the traditions within the Churches of Christ that Christians should no longer adhere to.[17] Cates complains that "Brethren Harris and Shelly propose to give us 'a theology for the 21st century church' (p. xiii); they will 'reexamine the foundation' (p. xiv)."[18] Once more, he calls attention to the urgency of stopping "The mouths of false witnesses."[19] He believes that these two men are attacking the truth.[20] He then relies upon **2 John 9—11** to justify separation and ostracism from these two men.[21]

Two years after the publication of the above book, Cates wrote another book in which he refers to Shelly by citing the words of Jesus in **Matthew 7:15**: "Jesus warned, 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly

are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them' (Mat. 7:15-16)."[22] In 1990, C. Leonard Allen published a book[23] that also caused him to come under "fire" from Cates as a false prophet. Cates accuses Allen of disrespect for the Word and also charges him with treating the Word as "unrealistic" and "fairy tale-like":

> In other words, what brethren did was fairy tale-like and unrealistic; one cannot know what Truth is, and to think he can is to merely dream. Is that what Christ commanded when He said, "Beware of false prophets…" (Mat. 7:15), or when He warned, "But in vain do they worship me, Teaching [sic] as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mat. 15:9), or "Let them [false teachers and their religions] alone: they are blind guides" (Mat. 15:14), or what Paul meant when he charged, ". . . to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5).[24]

In 1996, Jim Waldron, another patternist, wrote an article in which he, too, took to task the theology of Shelly and Harris. He, too, bemoans the fact that the teachings of Shelly and Harris have infiltrated the mission fields.[25] He further castigates these men by citing articles by Choate,[26] also patternistic in his theology, in which he says,

> He is also demonstrating how false teachers in this generation are seeking to do the same thing in some of our schools. Also, the *Firm Foundation* has over the last five years documented much of the current digressive movement coming out of Abilene Christian University.[27]

This present crisis within the Churches of Christ involves the concept of pattern theology. Pattern theology, as stated above, is the belief that God has ordained a prescribed ritual to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner in order for there to be "worship in Spirit and truth." Waldron calls attention to ten men that do not advance the so-called five acts of worship, also known as pattern theology. Waldron, as he cites Choate, states the matter firmly:

> Brother Goebel Music in 1991 published *Behold The Pattern,* in which he meticulously documented the uncertain sounds of ten preachers and/or college professors. These men are: Max Lucado, San Antonio, Texas; Stephen Taylor, former professor of Abilene Christian University, who is now in England; Larry James, Plano, Texas; Rick Atchley, Fort Worth, Texas; Randy Fenter, San Antonio, Texas; Jim Hackney, Fort Worth, Texas; Jeff Walling, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Randy Mayeux, Dallas, Texas; Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tenn.; and Denny Boultinghouse, West Monroe, La.[28]

Just a perusal of the books and religious journals reveals the prevailing crisis that crystallizes around this expression (five acts): For example, Garland Elkins, Dean of Public Relations in the Memphis School of Preaching, asserts:

> There is a true worship. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Without hesitation, we affirm that worship to God under the New Testament consists of preaching (Acts 20:7), the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16),

praying (Acts 2:42), and the giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2). These five acts are the only authorized acts of worship to God.[29]

LOCAL DISSENSION IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The Churches of Christ in Montgomery, AL are experiencing turmoil in unparalleled consequences—disunity. The Seibles Road Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL publishes a bulletin weekly to call attention to apostasy—defection as defined by the Seibles Road Church of Christ "interpretative community."[30] This bulletin prints articles by various authors to call attention to those who are so-called false prophets within the Churches of Christ.

The minister, O. B. Porterfield of the Seibles Road Church of Christ republished, in his November 3, 1996 bulletin an article written (originally written on September 25, 1996) by Ray Dutton, a former member of the Landmark Church of Christ. The Dutton article is prefaced with some remarks by O. B. Porterfield in which he reminds his readers that in May 1994 that he wrote about Buddy Bell and Joe Beam's appearance on Faulkner University's "Focus." His Preface is titled: "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery."[31] In this "Preface," he expresses sorrow that his efforts were futile. He could not prevent these two men from appearing on Faulkner University's lectureship.

In the third paragraph of Dutton's letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ, he says, "Recently, I became very upset about the scheduling of a known false teacher to speak to our young people."[32] Dutton continues in this letter to speak of Bell's association with other known false teachers: "Though I was well aware that Buddy had a reputation for keeping company with a number of known false teachers, I had hoped that he was personally committed to the truth of God."[33] He then cites **Matthew 7:15** in warning the family at Landmark about Buddy Bell now minister of the Landmark congregation. He writes of the danger of the souls at the Landmark Church of Christ.

> I would give up my family at Landmark and never return if that alone would save the many precious souls here who are now gravely in danger from a man I now believe is a false teacher "secretly brought in" (Gal. 2:4), who has come to God's flock in "sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15) but is in truth a "ravenous wolf."[34]

Matthew 7:15 is cited by Dutton as applicable to Bell. Dutton relates a series of questions that he presented to Bell in order to elicit from him his feelings about "(1) 'BAPTISM,' (2) 'INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC and DENOMINATIONALISM,' (3) 'SOLOS, CHOIRS, QUARTETS AND OTHER SPECIAL MUSIC,' (4) 'THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH,' (5) 'HONESTY WITH THE BRETHREN,' AND (6) 'FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DENOMINATIONS.'"[35] As a result of this encounter, Dutton then cites **Titus 3:10** and combines this Scripture with **2 John 9—11** to justify his characterization of Bell as a false teacher.

Joe Beam,[36] another minister who calls for reflection upon traditionalism, came under attack again by Jerry C. Brewer. Brewer cited **Romans 16:17-18**, **2 John 9—11**, and

Ephesians 5:11 to uphold his belief that Beam is a false teacher.[37] Another Montgomery minister, Philip Black, minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ, also received a reprimand from Porterfield[38] and, at the same time, he also received the epithet of false teacher from Armond Hoover. Hoover expresses his concern over Black's influence within the Churches of Christ and then labels him as a false teacher.

> Your shallowness is showing, Brother Black. Brother O. B. and all other knowledgeable and understanding Christians know that only God can and will condemn the disobedient to His Will. However the righteous and obedient are commanded to (and will) warn and mark all false teachers and the disobedient (Rom. 16:17-18), beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15-16) (or be aware – A.H.). A warning, Grievous wolves (false teachers—A. H.) will enter among us, not sparing the flock, even our own selves to draw away (deceive – A.H.) disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).[39]

The third Church of Christ to come under attack in Montgomery, AL was the Vaughn Park Church of Christ. Mark Smith, at the time of the attack, was the pulpit minister for this congregation.[40] On July 13, 1997, Porterfield lashed out against all three congregations (Landmark, Carriage Hills, and Vaughn Park) for their participation in a lectureship called "Jubilee." He wrote: "BUDDY BELL, minister at Landmark, and PHILIP BLACK, minister at the F.O.G (Carriage Hills), were on the program and Vaughn Park advertised and encouraged people to attend this gathering of heretics."[41] In another bitter article, Porterfield cited **Matthew 7:15** as applicable to Mark Smith: "We proved his error by the scriptures. Matt. 7:1-5 condemns harsh judgment, but a judgment must be made according to Matt. 7:15-16. John 7:24 command [sic] righteous judgement according to the Word of God, Psa. 119:172."[42]

These citations from the *Seibles Road Church of Christ* bulletin illustrate the crises that presently exist in the city of Montgomery, AL. I have reviewed the issues of this bulletin for the last two years, and almost without exception every page of this paper summons the same Scriptures to justify separation from those who do not explain the Word of God as it is presently interpreted by this particular "interpretative community," namely, the Seibles Road Church of Christ. This brief review of the contemporary situation of division within the Churches of Christ in Montgomery calls for a reexamination of how to interpret and understand Scripture in light of its context.

CONCLUSION

This essay examined the controversy within the Churches of Christ as to who is or who is not a false prophet. Journals and books were called forth to illustrate the confusion that exists among so many devout Christians. It was observed that Christians often tag other Christians as misleading teachers when anyone dares to go against the grain of the intelligence of the religious leaders in certain "interpretative communities." Every Christian is confronted with the question: Is deformity in comprehension in and of itself sufficient grounds for the epithet of false prophet? One must determine who is and who is not a counterfeit teacher from Scripture, not tradition.

The question is, Is one a sham teacher simply because one believes in instrumental music, handclapping in the assembly, solo singing, Sunday schools, individual communion cups, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on? Since Jesus warns against imitation prophets (**Matthew 7:15**, **24:11,24**), then believers do have a responsibility to identify those who come under this classification. One must recognize a false teacher through a correct application of Scripture, not through the traditions of men. The Word of God alone is the criterion that can assist one in making this determination.[43]

The perusals of the various Church of Christ journals revealed that certain Scriptures were relied upon to justify separation from other believers. Two Scriptures cited were **2 John 9**[44] and **Matthew 7:15**. Many writers, in order to uphold their practice of ostracism, cited these verses to justify their narrow perception of fellowship among other Christians.

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[1] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 29.

[2] Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement, he wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," ***Millennial Harbinger,*** New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

[3] To illustrate, for example, the confusion that exists within one of the major divisions within the Churches of Christ—the one-cup and non-Sunday school church—see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and, then under the subheading LORD'S SUPPER**.** This essay details the many oddities advanced by the many divisions within this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. Pattern theology is what the divisions are mainly fought over. The question for many is: What is the divine pattern for the five-acts? For the study of five-acts, see

also Dallas Burdette, "Sunday Morning Worship: Five Acts? [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001] located under caption SERMONS, and, then under subheading WORSHIP.

[4] Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[5] For an interpretation of the "interpretative community," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171, where he says,

> Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. . . . . The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.

[6] Stafford North, "How To Be Undenominational In A Denominational World," in Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, eds., *Directions for the Road Ahead: Stability in Change Among Churches of Christ* (Chickasha, Oklahoma: Yeomen Press, 1998), 207.

[7] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 15.

[8] Robert Meyers, ed., *Voices of Concern* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1966).

[9] Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic,* translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 255-264; see also David Melling, *Understanding Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-113.

[10] Myers, *Voices of Concern*, 1.

[11] For an excellent discussion of the so-called five acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman, see Buff Scott. Jr., "Acts of Worship," *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1993): 3-7. See also Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992); Mike Root, *UnBroken Bread: Healing, Worship, Wounds* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1997).

[12] See, for example, Don L. King, " Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where he expresses his rejection of those who do not conform to his interpretative community's stance on one-cup and non-Sunday school beliefs.

> Why do we worship with one cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful, to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one cup violates the examples given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did, "this do ye…." (1 Corinthians 11:25), etc., etc. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. If it is wrong to use more than one cup in the Lord's Supper I can't worship with those who use more than one. If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? [sic].

[13] Neale T. Pryor, "The Essentials of the Faith: What Cannot Change," in *Church Unity: Stability & Flexibility in the Church*, 1995 Preacher's Forum, Harding University, Graduate School of Religion, ed. Donald Kinder (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1995), 33.

[14] Curtis Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1992), 18.

[15] Ibid., 19.

[16] Ibid.

[17] See Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

[18] Cates, *Incarnation*, 20.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 25-27. For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001] located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and, then, under the subheading EXEGESIS OF MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES**;** For a an excellent and detailed study on 2 John 9, see also Carl Ketcherside, "Receive Him Not," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 81-90.

[22] Curtis Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted: Shall We Have a New "Cultural Church"?* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1994), 15.

[23] C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

[24] Cates, *Concept Refuted,* 38, 39.

[25] Jim Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," *Firm Foundation* 111, no. 9 (September 1996): 13.

[26] For an example of the five-acts of worship by Choate, see J. C. Choate, *Gospel Sermonnettes* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 1993) , 102-104.

[27] Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," Firm *Foundation*, 13. For additional reading in this same vein, see Jim Laws, Lectureship director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); and William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ: A Study In Contemporary problems With Change Agents Among Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994).

[28] Ibid. For a detailed study and approval of this concept of pattern theology (five acts), see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, Texas: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 393-394. See also Cates, *Incarnation*, 27-28.

[29] Garland Elkins, "Foreword," in Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 12-13.

[30] This bulletin may be obtained from Seibles Road Church of Christ, 541 Seibles Rd., Montgomery, AL.

[31] O. B. Porterfield, "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[32] Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 2.

[35] Ibid., 3.

[36] Joe Beam was a former pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ—now called Family of God (F.O.G.)—in the city of Montgomery, AL.

[37] Jerry C. Brewer, "Oklahoma Brethren Issue Warning That Is On The 'Beam,'" Seibles *Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (February 2, 1997): 2.

[38] O. B. Porterfield, "A Reader Responds And Speaks Out!," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (January 19, 1997): 1.

[39] Armond Hoover, "Dear Philip Black," Ibid., 2. This article also criticizes unity in diversity and recommends Goebel Music's book, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991). For a counter position of

Hoover's negative statements about unity in diversity, see Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 97-112 [1-16].

[40] See David Hester, "OFF THE MARK," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (May 18, 1997): 1 for his castigation of Mark Smith as a false teacher as well as a host of others labeled as false teachers.

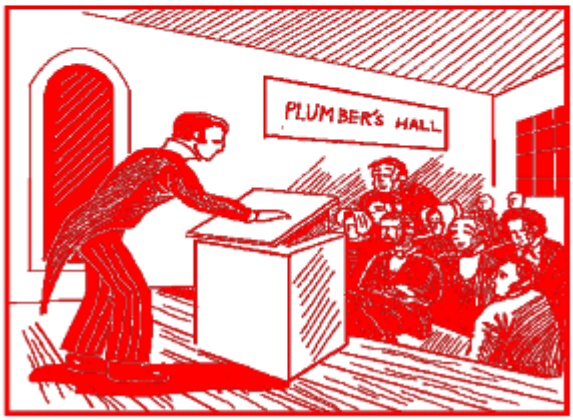
[41] This commentary (comments) by Porterfield is written in support of an article written by Robert Dodson, "The Move to Unite With Denominationalists," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (July 13, 1997): 2.

[42] These comments are in response to an article written by Clifton D. Kelly, "Worrying Too Much About Error? *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (December 21, 1997): 2. See also Dallas Burdette, "Judge Not," [ON-LINE] for an examination of this much-abuse Scripture (Matthew 7:1). Available from www.freedominchrit.net [accessed 30 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, and then under subheading EXEGESIS OF MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[43] For a more detailed study of "false teachers" in the gospel of Matthew, see Dallas Burdette, "The Political Power of the Pharisees and Their Oral Traditions" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrit.net (accessed 30 January 2001], located under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, then under the subheading LEADERSHIP.

[44] See Dallas Burdette, "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?—for an example of context interpretation [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES, then under EXEGESIS OF MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES. For an opposing view, see C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5; Mike McDanie, "The Right Hand of Fellowship," part 2, *The Light* 27, no. 1 (January 1996): 3-6; Carl Johnson, "The Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 2 (February 1996): 1, 7-8; James Meadows, "Does the New Testament Represent a Pattern to Follow?" *Firm Foundation* 110, no. 12 (December 1995): 8-10; Stan Cox, "Is Sincerity Sometimes Enough?" *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 8 (April 20, 1995): 21-22; Tom M. Roberts, "Romans 14: Satan's Trojan Horse for Fellowship with Error," *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 4 (February 16, 1995): 110-113 [12-17]; Don Walker, "Second John 9 in Light of Context," *The Restorer* (May/June 1989): 11-14; Jerry Moffitt, "Why I Don't Have Fellowship With Denominational 'Pastors' and Catholic Priests," *Contending for the Faith* XXVI, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 3-6; William Woodson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *The Spiritual Sword* 22, no. 3 (April 1991): 35-38; Roy Deaver, "Who 'Splits the Log'?" *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983):11-13; Garland Elkins, "'Receive Him Not'—II John 9-11," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no. 2 (January 1974): 31-34.

The Fossilized Tranditions of Men Nullify the Commandments of God



Thrust Statement: **One can nullify the commandments of God through his/her fossilized traditions from the church fathers.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13**

INTRODUCTION

Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for their hypocrisy in their so-called worship of God. He charges them with worship that is vain through the commandments of men: "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (**Matthew 15:9**). Many Christians today hurl these words of Jesus against other believers when their practices do not coincide with their particular brand of orthodoxy. This citation of Matthew is wrenched from its context in order to justify the withdrawal of fellowship from other believers. Generally, this Scripture is alluded to in order to condemn other believers over the so-called five acts of worship, which so it is maintained that God ordained. Divisions exist within the Churches of Christ, as well as other denominations, over the exact pattern to be adhered to when Christians assemble on Sunday morning to carry out their ritualistic worship service.[1]

Should one cite this Scripture against other believers when they do not see "eye to eye" with his/her understanding of how the five acts are to be performed on Sunday morning? Is it appropriate to quote this famous passage (**15:9**) against disciples of Jesus who employ mechanical instruments—drums, harps, tambourines, pianos, and so on—in their assemblies? Is it proper to employ this citation from Matthew's Gospel to clobber any and all who dare use individual cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the observance of the communion? Is it fair to cite this verse against those who allow individuals to sing solo in the assembly? Is it correct to allude to this statement

of Jesus to condemn quartet singing in the Sunday morning gatherings? Should one refer to this rebuke by Jesus against followers of Jesus who use wine instead of grape juice as the drink element in the Lord's Supper? Or, should one call forth this Scripture citation of Jesus against congregations who choose to arrange classes on Sunday mornings to teach children and individuals according to their age?

MISAPPLICATION OF MATTHEW 15:1-9

Roy H. Lanier cites **Matthew 15:9** against those whom he believes are teaching doctrinal errors. Thus, if one is not doing things the way Lanier thinks they should be observed, then he calls forth **Matthew 15:9** with the following comments: "**God will not accept worship**. Jesus makes it clear that the worship of men are in serious doctrinal error will be vanity (Matt. 15:1-9—emphasis his)."[2] The focus of Lanier's comments is that God will not accept one's worship when there are serious doctrinal errors. But Lanier is the one who determines the weightiness of the doctrinal blunders. In this article Lanier skirts around the real issues without really naming the doctrinal errors explicitly, but in another article, he cites **Mark 7:1-14** (parallel to **Matthew 15:1-9**) to justify separation from Christians who employ the use of the instrument.[3] One cannot find fault with his statement: "Worship has always been a serious matter to God."[4] Is this not the reason that Jesus addresses the religious leaders about true worship? But when Lanier relies upon Jesus' castigation of the religious leaders to condemn Christians whose practices do not coincide with his understanding, he offers no evidence to uphold his application of **Mark 7:1-14**. He just assumes that his application is equal to Jesus' statement of rebuke.

Is it reasonable to repeat the words of Jesus in the Markan or Matthean passages to ostracize other Christians who participate in the above-mentioned acts performed on Sunday mornings that do not adhere to the thinking of Lanier and other Christians? On the face of his article, there does seem credibility, but, upon closer examination, one discovers that his arguments are not logical according to context. Cedric B. Johnson offers an informative comment in this regard when he writes:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms; and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.[5]

Just a slight perusal of the Matthean account of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and the religious leaders reveals that these individuals were guilty of nullifying one Scripture with another Scripture in order to maintain their position of neglecting their responsibilities of financial help toward their parents. Things have not changed. Today, many Christians are repeating the same type mental gymnastics the religious leaders exhibited in Jesus' day. It is not uncommon for believers to overthrow other clear passages of Scripture that advance the notion that unity is more important than perfect agreement upon every doctrinal point (see **Romans 14 and 15**; **1 Corinthians 8**). Just as Satan sought to cancel out one Scripture with another

Scripture, so, today, Christians frequently cancel one Scripture with another (see **Matthew 4:1-11**).

There is a need for a reevaluation of **Matthew 15:9** in light of its context. It is possible for an interpreter to miss the intended meaning because of an incomplete understanding of the pericope (unit or section) in question. One's interpretation of **Matthew 15:1-9** is often colored by one's preconceived ideas as to what the "commandments of God" constitute. This phrase is seized upon by many well-meaning Christians to target any interpretation of the Scriptures that does not uphold a particular party interpretation. Each isolated faction cites this same Scripture to hack to death the opposite splinter group that does not consent to the other's ecclesiastical organization's viewpoint. Each side wishes to shoot the other side with the word *hypocrite*.

This word *hypocrite* (υΣποκριτηψ, &upokriths) is indiscriminately directed toward anyone who dares to hold a different view from the so-called guardians of truth. Jesus employs this word against the religious leaders for their manipulation of the text of Scripture. When one confounds the Word of God with his/her interpretation, then there is a sense in which this word *hypocrite* may accurately describe the one who hurls such derogatory remarks against the other. Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers give a concise answer to the meaning of this word as employed by Jesus: "Hypocrite, a legalist who manipulates the law w. casuistry and hair-splitting interpretation for his own benefit."[6] Before investigating the use of the word *hypocrite* by Jesus, perhaps a few examples of how this pericope (**Matthew 15:1-9**) is employed by the various warring factions within the Churches of Christ should shed some light on the dilemma that many Christians face in approaching differences within the community of Christ. Since this essay introduced Lanier as an example of one who has misapplied this section (**15:1-9**) of Jesus' words, it is appropriate that one begin with more of an in-depth view of his handling of the text.[7]

Roy H. Lanier

Many sincere Christians, such as Roy H. Lanier, as mentioned above, relate this passage against those who encourage a wider view of fellowship. He defends his views of banishment based upon his understanding of this much-abused text. He explains his justification for kicking out others from his sectarian group very forcefully in his comments:

> Isolated along the fringes of the "front line," in the warfare concerning proper fellowship, are the lonely preachers and teachers of the Midwest. Men in the states north of Oklahoma, east of the Rocky Mountains, and west of the Ohio Valley, are the ones bearing the brunt of questions of fellowship with Independent Christian Churches, since that is the area of their strongest work. . . . Typical questions I receive might include the following: (1) "Can we say the 'instrumental brethren' are not to be fellowshipped since God did not specify instrumental music is wrong?" (2) "Even if they are guilty of presumptuous sin, can we not fellowship them?" . . . Such questions may not include all the details of the problems that exist between the Lord's church and the Independent Christian Churches, but they are representative of most

> of the principles involved . . . which Jesus said was a rejection of the commandments of God (v.9) [emphasis mine—RDB).[8]

One can quickly observe the subtlety in Lanier's distinction between his distinctive religious crowd and other groups. He leaves out the Independent Christian Churches as a part of the Lord's Church, only his odd fellowship constitutes the true Church. Lanier seems to have forgotten that his denomination is just one denomination among others that came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement.[9] The three distinct religious clusters that came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement are: (1) Churches of Christ, (2) Christians Churches, and (3) Disciples of Christ. He is typical of many Christians who apply **Matthew 15:9** against other Christians. As a young preacher, back in the 60s and early 70s, I cited this Scripture against him for his use of individual cups and his participation in Sunday school (now called Bible study).

In Lanier's zeal to be true to God, he states, without any proof, that one's employment of the instrument in praising God is a "heart problem, not a hermeneutical one."[10] He discounts that there is another side to the controversy.[11] One cannot help but reflect upon the words of Paul to the Romans as one reads such a stinging castigation of someone with whom Lanier differs. Listen to Paul as he rebukes some of the Christians at Rome for their lack of toleration for different opinions:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (**Romans 14:1-5**).

Lanier's association of the music question with the "commandments of men," is based upon his faulty understanding of worship—a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner.[12] He has jumped to a number of unjustified conclusions. He is skilled in his *proof-texting* approach to substantiate his beliefs. In fact, he wrenches **Romans 16:17**, **Titus 3:10**, and **2 John 9-11** to bolster his claims for his ungodly behavior.[13] But Lanier is not alone in this kind of reading of the text as taught by generations of interpreters. The traditions in the church make it difficult to read accurately the text. Every Christian must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down from generation to generation. Lanier is in danger of finding himself the prisoner of his own tradition, which is sovereign among his fellowship. The next case study is from Homer L. King, former editor of Old Paths Advocate (a one-cup and non-Sunday school journal). He, too, cites this same Scripture (**Matthew 15:1-9**) to justify his separation from men like Lanier.

Homer L. King

Homer L. King (1892-1983)[14] also cited **Mark 7:7-9** to justify his break with men like Lanier.[15] King, like Lanier, relied upon **2 John 9**,[16] **Matthew 15:9, 13**,[17] and **Jeremiah 6:16**[18] to rationalize separation from Christians who refused to equate King's interpretation of the Word with the Word itself. The following chart gives the three citations that he used to justify his unbrotherly behavior:

2 John 9	**Matthew 15: 9, 13**	**Jeremiah 6:16**
Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.	They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men (**v. 9**). "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots (**v. 13**).	This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'

King did not accept men like Lanier. Why? Well, he believed that he was not continuing in the "teaching of Christ" according to **2 John 9**. Since Lanier employs individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, then his worship is vain because he is teaching the "commandments of men." The acceptance of individual communion cups and Sunday school constituted "commandments of men" according to King and those associated with the Old Paths Advocate clique. According to King, Lanier left the old paths as mentioned by **Jeremiah 6:16**. King forcefully argues the validity of his decision:

> The above Scriptures and many others forbid any changes in matters of divine arrangement. . . . If we conform to the above law of limitation, we know that we shall have to abandon any claim to human creeds, human names for the church or its members, denominational churches, human organizations and societies to do the work of the church . . . instrumental music, Sunday schools, cups in the communion, the modern pastory system wherein the evangelist is taken out of his sphere to do the work of the elder. . . . Hence, we cannot remain or abide in the "doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9) while contending for them.[19]

In this article, King rebukes Christians who practice the clergy system, participate in Bible colleges, sing with instrumental accompaniment, provide Sunday schools for various ages, serve grape juice in individual cups instead of one common cup, and breaks the bread into pieces instead of pinching the bread so that it remains whole. The thing that grabs one's attention is his reference to **Matthew 15:9** to defend his actions. Yet, this is the identical Scripture that Lanier also names to justify his disconnection from Christians who disagree with him. King, like Lanier, manipulates this Scripture to condemn Lanier for his involvement in the so-called "innovations," such as individual cups and Sunday school. On the other hand, Lanier quotes this same passage to account for his split with the Christian Church. Both men employ this

passage directed against the religious leaders in Jesus' day to rationalize their rupture of the body of Christ into warring factions.

Lanier, as mentioned above, thinks that Christians who disagree with his interpretations have a heart problem. Yet, the one-cup and non-Sunday school Movement also thinks that its position is not a matter of hermeneutics either, but rather a heart problem for those who do not concur with its fanciful interpretations. As one reflects upon the long-established interpretation of **Matthew 15:9**, one quickly discovers that the position of both men appear to be built on unverifiable arguments, that is to say, the points of view of both Lanier and King turn on assumptions rather than on a careful reading of the text. These men are not reading the wording based on Jesus' own concerns, but rather they are reading the text established upon their personal theological urgencies. When one misunderstands the Word of God, that, in and of itself, does not indicate that the individual has a heart problem. The following letter to this author by his second cousin (one-cup and non-Sunday school) illustrates the principle also enunciated by Lanier—"heart problem."

Mark Bailey and the Heart

The cited letter below from Mark Bailey is not to impugn his sincerity, but rather to illustrate the mind-set of some Christians when other Christians cannot concur with their particular brand of orthodoxy. In this letter, Bailey accuses the author of this essay of dishonesty:

> Dear Dallas,
> I trust this letter finds you well, at least physically, for biblically your spiritual life is a shamble. My prayer is that your heart will soon be open for the simple truths of God's word and in action will obey them. I consider speaking to you on biblical subjects almost useless because you know the truth, as well, if not better, than I do.[20]

One cannot help but wonder about his statement concerning the one he condemns—"You know the truth, as well, if not better, than I do." If this testimonial is true, which he claims that it is, then one cannot help but wonder why Bailey does not listen more attentively to Burdette in his explanation of the Passover traditions in the first century.[21] I do not question his sincerity or the motives of his heart, but one must still seek to expound the Word of God to him more accurately.[22] Since he refuses to undertake a free examination of his long-held cherished traditions, he allows himself to participate in absurd behavior toward a fellow believer in Jesus the Messiah. He fails to recognize that interpretation allows a margin of liberty. The Movement of which he is a part becomes more and more oppressive, as it grows older, by reason of its own past.

One must not confuse an honest mistake of the heart with rebellion against God. This confusion has sent Christian communities into a tailspin. This author is eternally grateful to Carl Ketcherside who first brought this concept of distinction between rebellions and an honest mistake of the heart to his attention. He says with clear insight: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus."[23] Once more, Ketcherside seems to

address correctly the dilemma of both Lanier and King when he writes: "All of them want to respect the authority of our Lord, but both groups confuse their interpretations with the Scriptures, and argue for the authority of their opinions as Scripture."[24]

It should be obvious to all Christians that when Christians disagree on the many issues that divide, the question is not that of the heart, but rather of hermeneutics. When Christians hold opposing views, "they," in the words of Ketcherside, "have not deserted Jesus. They have not fallen away from the faith. They have not defected from the Christian walk."[25] The words of Leroy Garrett also cut away all the underbrush that camouflages so much of one's hermeneutics and go right to the heart of the problem:

> People tire of our equating our understanding of the Word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in Scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the Scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other is human.[26]

COMMANDMENTS OF MEN

Any belief system that does not coincide with certain views as set forth by a particular party is looked upon as "commandments (rules) of men." **Matthew 15:9** is utilized by many sincere believers, as stated earlier, to advocate the matching error that the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were guilty of in setting aside one Scripture with another Scripture. Each Christian community should reexamine Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders in order to determine more accurately the focal point of emphasis.[27] It is not uncommon for religious leaders today to invalidate the effectiveness of God's Word by not keeping in mind the oneness of Scripture. The principle that the Reformers advanced is still true—Scripture interprets Scripture. Interpreters of the Word revoke one passage with another passage. The principles of the Reformation must always continue, that is, there must always be the principle of reexamination in order to rectify and correct erroneous interpretations placed upon God's Word. The sovereignty of a tradition is often the result of a polluted source of other traditions. One must be careful of any Reformation Movement that claims absolute power over souls.

As stated earlier, one's explanation of **Matthew 15:9** is often colored by his/her preconceived ideas as to what constitutes the "commandments of men."[28] The "commandments of men" are often associated with the following, even though the various groups can never properly identify what is and what is not the commandment (s) of God versus what is and what is not the commandments of men in dealing with a particular practice, for example: (1) church cooperation or non-church cooperation, (2) long hair on women or cut hair [some maintain that a woman cannot even cut the dead-ends off her hair], (3) women wearing a head covering in the assembly [artificial veil—usually a doily] or uncut hair, which, according to some, is the veil, (4) one common cup or individual cups,[29] (5) Sunday school or non-Sunday school,[30] (6) wine in the Lord's Supper or grape juice in the Lord's Supper, (7) solo or congregational singing or both,[31] (8) singing acappella or with instrumental

accompaniment, (9) no divorce for any reason—not even adultery or fornication, (10) breaking the communion bread versus pinching the bread, and so on. This list that many Christians append to the "commandments of men" are innumerable—left only to the imagination of men.[32]

MATTHEW 15:1-9 IN LIGHT OF ITS CONTEXT

Both Matthew and Mark record the hostilities of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law against Jesus. Douglas Hare captures the very essence of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders in his concise statement: "He challenged his challengers by subordinating ritual observance to ethical behavior."[33] The religious leaders questioned Jesus about the conduct of His disciples, which violated their long-held traditions. But Jesus responded by calling attention to their flagrant disregard of the fifth commandment in the Decalogue. They violated God's Commandment for their traditions. Mark recorded this stinging rebuke from Jesus against the religious leaders unethical conduct: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men" (**Mark 7:8**).

When Christians apply **Matthew 15:1-9** and **Mark 7:1-13** to other Christians who do not give their blessings or consent to a sleight-of-the-hand in handling the Scriptures as carelessly as the religious leaders did, then the manipulators are just as guilty of manipulating the Scriptures to uphold their traditions as were the ones whom Jesus hauled over the coals. At the time of this confrontation Jesus was in Gennesaret (**Matthew 14:34**), which was sixty-five miles from Jerusalem. These leaders were so hostile to the Messiah that they were willing to travel such a long distance in order to confront him for not binding the tradition of the Elders upon his disciples. The leaders did

not waste any time upon their arrival to question Him: "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" (**15:2**).[34]

The Traditions of the Elders

These traditions were regarded as equally binding as the Word of God. In the time of Christ, the teachers of the law—also called scribes—instilled into their children the interpretation of the law as handed down by the famous rabbis. Eventually, the traditions became so enormous that Rabbi Jehuda committed the "tradition of the elders" to writing in 200 CE. This compilation of the traditions became known as the *Mishnah*, a word formed from a verb meaning "to repeat." This massive work contains the traditions that predate Christ about 200 years up to 200 years after Christ's birth. In time, it became apparent that such an enormous work needed to be interpreted, so a commentary was written to explain the traditions, which today is known as the *Gemara*, which word is derived from a verb meaning "to complete." Eventually these two works—*Mishnah* and *Gemara*—were combined and became known as the *Talmud*, which word is related to the verb meaning "to teach."[35]

The Pharisees and scribes (teachers of the Law) questioned Jesus about the tradition of the elders concerning the washing of the hands, but Jesus questioned them about their disregard for God's Law:

Matthew 15:1-2	Matthew 15:3-6
Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, [2] "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"	Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? [4] For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' [5] But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' [6] he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

This particular tradition, so it appears, is based upon the command of God to Aaron and his sons concerning the washing of hands before performing their duties in the Tabernacle:

> [17] Then the LORD said to Moses, [18] "Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. [19] Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. [20] Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, [21] they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come" (**Exodus 30:17-21**).

This command had nothing to do with the washing of hands for the ordinary Israelite, but this instruction concerned the priests officiating at the Tabernacle. In the time of Jesus, one senses an intense desire on the part of the Israelites to maintain holiness, but this yearning resulted in exaggerated emphasis upon rituals to the neglect of that which really mattered with God. William Hendriksen has correctly observed that the religious leaders "substituted mere legalism for true piety, outward conformity to the tradition for the attitude of heart and mind, and torturing scrupulosity for glad obedience."[36] Jesus calls the Pharisees and teachers of the Law *hypocrites* for their neglect of the weightier matters of the Law and for their scrupulosity for the traditions of the elders.

Hypocrite: Play Acting

As mentioned above, the English word *hypocrite* is a transliteration[37] of the Greek word υΣποκριτηψ (&upokriths). F. W. Albright and C. S. Mann reject the traditional rendering *hypocrite* as *play-acting*.[38] These two scholars prefer the word *shysters*,[39] and their assessment of this confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders is full of insight. Both men paint a vivid description of this scene:

> Here at vii 5 there is enough of the pejorative sense to indicate Jesus' impatience with the legalism which is aware only of failure of observance in others. At xv 7 we have elected to use the colloquialism "shyster!" which connotes a total disregard for the purpose of the Law while ostensibly paying reverence to it. The incident which provoked Jesus' exclamation in xxii 18 seemed again to demand "You casuists!" for here the aim of a supposedly harmless question was to bring a charge of lawlessness against him.[40]

"You casuists" captures the essence of what Jesus felt about these leaders. Again, Albright and Mann further illuminate this word *hypocrite*:

We may even carry the sense a step further and speak of someone as "hypercritical," intending to convey the idea that a person is given to fine, hairsplitting distinction, but we do not at the same time accuse such a person of "being a hypocrite" in our modern sense. We suggest only that his faculty of discernment is carried too far for ordinary purposes.[41]

Dave Miller

This hairsplitting tendency is not just a phenomenal that occurred in the first century, but, even today, one observes the same kind of hairsplitting that the religious leaders engaged in. For instance, Dave Miller, Director of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Bedford, Texas, is distressed about "handclapping" in the so-called worship service.[42] Not only does he object to this behavior in the assembly, but he also objects to the practice of handclapping after baptism.[43] For Miller, one's emotions must be contained inwardly. One cannot help but wonder if Miller would have rebuked the eunuch for rejoicing after his baptism. Listen to Luke as he records the excitement on the part of the eunuch following his baptism:

> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (**Acts 8:34-39**).

This accusation against Miller may seem overstated; nevertheless, just a perusal of his tirade against handclapping demonstrates that this allegation against him is not an understatement. The following extract from Miller's article explains the indictment:

> Handclapping is occurring in our assemblies in two forms. First, some clap in rhythm to their worship in song. . . . Striking the hand together while singing is no more acceptable to God than striking the hands on a drum while singing. Handclapping is simply a "natural" from of "mechanical"

> instrumental music. . . . Handclapping is also taking place in the form of applause—usually after a baptism or during a sermon.[44]

The result of his complaint is a number of statements that have little or nothing in their favor to sustain his condemnation of handclapping. He assumes that God condemns such behavior, but he presents no evidence to uphold his conclusions. He offers his objections without sound arguments from Holy Scripture. Not only is Miller enraged about "handclapping," but he also wages war against solo singing in the assembly:

> But the New Testament is extremely clear on the matter. Singing is to be congregational, i.e., the entire church participating together in the singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Paul's reference to "each one has a psalm" (1 Cor. 14:26 is a reference, not to solos, but most likely to inspired human writers who provided the infant church with suitable psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. No authority exists for solos and choirs in the assembly (emphasis mine—RDB).[45]

In this essay, he attacks drama, the Lord's Supper on other days than Sundays, and the dedication of babies. This dedication of babies is not the same as infant baptism. He also objects to female worship leaders who wait on the Lord's Table, sings solos, direct choirs, read Scripture, and lead prayer.[46] What is Miller's proof for rejecting solo singing, which, according to certain Christians, is a "commandment of men," not a "commandment of God." Miller refutes solo singing with the words "most likely," and then assumes that the "most likely" had reference to "inspired human writers." With the flick of a pen, Miller assigns the practices of generations to the trash heap of history. In his entire inferno against solo singing, he produces no concrete evidence to uphold his views. For one to be true to the text, one must interpret the text as it is given, not interpret with an unnatural meaning in order to make a text conform to the "traditions" of a self-styled ecclesiastical organization—his group—as the citadel of all truth.

The theme of the journal[47] in which Miller's article appeared is: "The Church at the Crossroads." This entire issue is dealing with what these men consider to be the "commandments of men." In fact, two of the last four authors in this special issue make reference to Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders.[48] All of the articles in this special issue are peppered with Scripture. But just simply citing the Word of God does not, in and of itself, prove anything. One must rightly divide the Word of God.

David Hester

Another author who espouses the same type of philosophy that Dave Miller champions is David Hester, minister for the Church of Christ.[49] O. B. Porterfield, editor of *The Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin*, published an article by Hester in which Hester bemoans the fairness of a religious journal called Ensign, published by Pat Kilpatrick in Huntsville, AL.[50] To illustrate the chicanery of Scripture citations without reference to context can be found in Hester's objection to my essay on **Romans 16:17**.[51] He responded to my article and then I responded to his article, but in his final response, he replied with a silly argument, apparently without thinking

about what he was saying, by grasping for a straw to maintain his sectarian position on **Romans 16:17**. Listen to Hester as he sets forth an argument that is as full of holes as is a sieve:

> Romans 16:17-18 is still in our Bibles, and will be until the Lord comes again. We need to read it, and heed it. As a Gospel preacher, I will give an account of what I have preached at the day of judgment. I will also give an account of whether I have been faithful in striving for unity, and not division.[52]

My essay on **Romans 16:17** that he objects to so strenuously never denies that **Romans 16:17-18** is a part of God's Holy Word. Yes, in the words of Hester, it will continue to be there "until the Lord comes again." But that is not the issue. The question is whether Christians, within certain sectarian groups within the Churches of Christ, have interpreted this passage in light of its context? Hester seems to think that just surface reading is all that is necessary for a correct understanding of the Word. Does one need to examine the intent of the author? The author may say one thing and mean something else. For instance, one may read from this same letter about kissing: "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings" (**Romans 16:16**). Does this Scripture need interpretation? Does Hester demand this act of kissing as a part of the Christian community today? Yes, it is in the Bible and will continue to be in the Bible until Jesus comes. For one to simply cite a Scripture does not tell the whole story. For example, consider the following Scriptures:

Matthew 5:39	**Matthew 5:42**
But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.	Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

John 13:12-17	**1 Corinthians 16:20**
When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.	All the brothers here send you greetings.

Yes, **Matthew 5:39** is in the Bible, but does Jesus say that if one hits you in the head with a baseball bat—the left side—and you survive, then you are to stand up and let him/her have one more shot? The answer is no! It is also true that **Matthew 5:42** is in the Bible, but does Jesus say that one cannot refuse someone if he/she wishes to borrow money? Again, one can say that **John 13:15** is in the Bible, but does Jesus mean that Christians must continue to wash the feet of His saints? Once again, one can say that **1 Corinthians 16:20** is also in the Bible, but does Paul mean that Christians must go around kissing one another today?

Before leaving Hester's illogical mind, perhaps, another illustration will demonstrate the ridiculousness of his argument in which he seeks to do away with my arguments according to the context. For example, the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is a classic example to refute the irrational argument of Hester. Satan confronted Jesus with citations from Scripture, but Jesus corrected Satan's attempt to nullify one Scripture with another Scripture. Satan says:

> 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (**Matthew 4:6**).

Satan cited **Psalms 91:11-12** to give validity to his request. But, on the other hand, Jesus also responded by citing Scripture: "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test' (**Matthew 4:7**). Jesus cited **Deuteronomy 6:16** to counter act the request of Satan. But one can almost hear the conversation between Jesus and Satan now—Satan says, "Well, Jesus, **Psalms 91:11-12** is still in the Bible and will continue to be there until the end of the ages." If Satan had followed the logic of Hester, then this logic would have been the proper response. It is not uncommon for many Christians to commit the same fallacy as Satan did in the citation of Scripture. It is not sufficient to just quote a passage, but one must seek to understand the intent of the author, not what the interpreter wishes him to say.

On the one hand, it is not uncommon for many individuals to fail to ask what a certain text means. On the other hand, what many Christians are concerned about is, How do I answer my opposition? Why do people often times find things that are not in the text? Perhaps, this finding is simply "monkey-see-monkey-do" mentality. One must always be conscious that he/she does not have a mechanistic or tape-recorder mentality. It is because of this tape-recorder mentality that even the Promise Keepers are included in the "commandments of men." For example, Jodie Boren, one of the writers for *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin*, cites **Matthew 15:9** to give credence to his complaints against many within the Churches of Christ that are accepting the "unity in diversity" concept among the promise keepers.[53]

There are approximately twenty-five or more divisions just within the Churches of Christ. Each fellowship considers itself the "true church." Thus, whatever one particular church believes, then if another church does not agree with its oddities in interpretation, then that fellowship is following the "commandments of men," not the commandments of God. Each one wants to assign the word *hypocrite* to any and all dissents. But in the light of the context, from which censure is drawn, one must

examine carefully to determine the mind-set of the religious leaders in their attempt to circumvent the fifth commandment of God for the sake of their traditions. The subject of "corban" entered this picture of condemnation of the part of Jesus.

CORBAN AS A GIFT TO GOD

The religious leaders used "corban" as justification for setting aside God's fifth commandment in the Decalogue. As noted above, there is a contrast between the "traditions of the elders" and the "commandments of God." Jesus accuses the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law for setting aside the instructions of God toward one's parents in order to uphold the oral traditions of men. In this encounter, Jesus calls attention to the fifth Commandment, which reads: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (**Exodus 20:12**). But the hairsplitting champions of orthodoxy sought to circumvent the legislation of God found in Exodus through their oral traditions. Their method in accomplishing this negation of God's Commandment was extremely crafty. In fact, Mark's Gospel, in revealing this encounter, says: "How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition!" (**Mark 7:9**).[54] How did the religious leaders get around this Commandment of God? Well, the teachers of the Law appealed to the "Corban Vow" to justify their actions for their total disregard for their financial obligation toward their parents. Listen once more to Jesus' response to their flagrant violation of this sacred Commandment:

> 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that" (**7:11-13**).

What does Corban mean? Corban can mean that which is dedicated to God. The religious leaders manipulated the teachings of God through the word *corban*. The English word *corban* is a transliteration of the Greek word κορβα'ν (korban). And the Greek word is a transliteration of the Hebrew word /B*r+q* (q(rb*n), which means "gift" in both languages. Mark translates the word korban as gift (δω'ρον, dwron). Alan McNeile points out that "*Koban*" . . . that which is brought near as an offering . . . and frequently in the Targums[55], is not transliterated in the LXX,[56] but rendered δω'ρον, dwron."[57] This concept of "gift" is fully worked out by William Hendriksen:

> The Pharisees and scribes were telling the children that there was a way to get around the heavy burden of having to bestow honor upon their parents by supporting them. If either father or mother, noticing that a son had something which was needed by the parent, asked for it, all that was necessary was for this son to say, "It's dwran (a gift)" or "q(rb*n (an offering)," Mark 7:11. Either way, whether the son uses the Greek word dwran or the Hebrew q(rb*n, he is really saying, "It is consecrated to God," and by making this assertion or exclamation he, according to Pharisaic teaching based on tradition, had released himself from the obligation of

honoring his parents—here "father" as also representing the mother—by helping them in their particular need.[58]

The religious leaders could take a scribal regulation to wipe out one of the Ten Commandments. Even today, a cursory glance of the religious journals within the Churches of Christ reveals how the traditions of bishop editors, powerful preachers, and domineering elders have made annulled, through centuries of fossilized traditions. Paul addresses the spirit of toleration in his epistles to Rome and Corinth. For example, **Romans 14 and 15** and **1 Corinthians 8** are made null and void through the careless treatment of **Matthew 15:9**. The phrase "commandments of men" would be more applicable to Roy Lanier, Homer King, Dave Miller, David Hester, and O. B. Porterfield than to the individuals they condemned with their citation from **Matthew 15:9**. These Scriptures (**Romans 14 & 15, 1 Corinthians 8**) are canceled through the careless treatment of **Matthew 15:9**. The following chart is given in order to facilitate the ease of identification of Paul's instructions to Rome and Corinth.

BOOK OF ROMANS	
Romans 14:1	**Romans 14:4**
Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.	Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:5	**Romans 14:19**
One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.	Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 15:1	**Romans 15:7**
We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.	Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS	
1 Corinthians 8:1-3	**1 Corinthians 8:4-7**
Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.	So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there

[2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God.	is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this.

1 Corinthians 8:9-11	**1 Corinthians 8:12-13**
Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.	When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Many well-meaning Christians violate these admonitions from the Holy Spirit. Christians circumvent these instructions through advancing the notion that perfect vision is required before one can extend the right hand of fellowship. But this practice of 20/20 vision did not exist in the first century church and neither does it exist today. Individuals are to receive others in the same way that the Lord has received them to the glory of God. How has God received His people today? Is it not with "warts and all"? Does not God receive individuals with imperfection in their knowledge as well as shortcomings in their lives?[59] Jesus, too, dealt with "dullness" in understanding among His disciples. For instance, on one occasion, Jesus says to the apostles,

> "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. [17] "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? [18] But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' [19] For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. [20] These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'" (**Matthew 15:16-20**)

On another occasion concerning bread, Jesus again calls attention to their lack of understanding the obvious:

> [5] When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. [6] "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." [7] They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." [8] Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? [9] Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? [10] Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? [11] How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." [12] Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Matthew 16:5-12**).

Are Christians today in fellowship with Christians in error? All Christians are in error on some point. No one has 20/20 vision. Is truth true? Is error error? Yes! But one must keep in mind that even though all truth is true, nevertheless, all truth is not essential to one's salvation, if so, then no one could be saved. What about error? All error is error, but not all error will condemn one's soul, if so, then no one could be saved. The community of God is fractured and splintered over something that the Bible is totally silent about, namely, a worship service with its five ritualistic acts performed in a certain manner. As a young preacher boy, my uncle—E.H. Miller—taught me that the commandments of men had to do with the following:

- Individual communion cups
- Fermented wine
- Sunday school
- Instrumental music
- Breaking the bread into pieces
- Women praying in the assembly
- Women speaking in the assembly
- Women not wearing a veil (doily)
- Women who cut their hair (even the dead-ends)
- Kitchens in the church building

One could add many other items to the above list; it all depends on which group that one meets with today as to what constitutes the "commandments of men." William Barclay captures the very heart of the matter when he writes: "They had come to prefer their own man-made ingenuities to the great simplicities of the Law of God."[60] Again, Barclay paints a rather dismal picture of the religious leaders' concept of worship:

> To the Scribes and Pharisees worship was ritual, ceremonial law; to Jesus worship was the clean heart and the loving life. Here is the clash. And that clash still exists. What is worship? Even today there are many who would say that worship is not worship unless it is carried out by a priest ordained in a certain succession, in a building consecrated in a certain way, and from a liturgy laid down by a certain Church. And all these things are externals.

> One of the greatest definitions of worship ever laid down was laid down by William Temple: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." We must have a care lest we stand aghast at the apparent blindness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, lest we are shocked by their insistence on outward ceremonial, and at the same time be ourselves guilty of the same fault in our own way. Religion can never be founded on any ceremonies or ritual; religion must always be founded on personal relationships between man and God.[61]

The Churches of Christ today are also divided over ritual ceremony, namely, five-acts.[62] Even today, it appears, so it seems to me, that Christians are more concerned over ritual than they are over right ethical conduct. Jesus' citation of Isaiah (739 BCE) is just as apropos today as it was seventeen hundred years ago. Again, one must go back to the context of **Mark 7:1-7** to gain the crux of what the controversy was all about. Listen once more to Jesus as he issues His stinging rebuke:

> He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written": 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. [7] They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' [8] You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men" (**Mark 7:6-8**).

Jesus' quoting from the Book of Isaiah struck the heart of the religious leaders to the quick. Even today, this citation from Isaiah should still flash like neon lights upon the Christian community. This was a cutting censure to religious leaders. In this citation from Isaiah, one quickly discovers that this rebuke is just as appropriate today as it was almost three thousand years ago. To set the stage for the context of **Matthew 15:9**, one must observe the conflict that Matthew sets forth in leading up to and after **Matthew 15:9**.

CONFLICT IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A perusal of conflict within the Gospel of Matthew should set the stage for a correct application of **Matthew 15:9**. The leaders that Jesus addressed did have a heart problem. These individuals were corrupt through and through. In fact, Matthew begins his Gospel with the religious leaders of John the Baptist and concludes his Gospel with Jesus' warning against these same leaders (**Matthew 23**). The entire Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict with the religious leaders from beginning to end.[63]

John the Baptist

This combat in Gennesaret is preceded with John the Baptist's ministry in the desert area of Judea (**3:1**). John, too, confronts the religious leaders for their scandalous nature:

> Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where John was baptizing people. When John saw them, he said, "You are all snakes! Who

warned you to run away from God's coming punishment? [8] Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives (**Matthew 3:7-8**, NCV).

Jesus the Messiah

These are the same leaders that Jesus also encountered. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law possessed an external religion, not one that is internal. Following John's encounter with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Matthew records Jesus' warning about these individuals whose lives were lived out of harmony with the will of God. Listen to Jesus as he forewarns his disciples: "I tell you that if you are no more obedient than the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**, ***NCV)***. Following Jesus' castigation of the religious leaders, Matthew follows this up with another clash between Jesus and the religious leaders in which the teachers of the Law go out of control when Jesus heals a paralytic and assures him that his sins are forgiven:

> Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. [2] Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." [3] At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" [4] Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? [5] Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? [6] But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." [7] And the man got up and went home. [8] When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men (**9:1-7**).

"Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts," said Jesus. Again, one is immediately confronted with another encounter with the religious leaders. Matthew's Gospel is riddled with resistance from the leaders of Israel. This time, it is not over the healing of a paralytic (**9:1-7**), but rather it is over the eating of grain on the Sabbath by His disciples (**12:1-8**). Once more, Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter:

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. [2] When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." [3] He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? [4] He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. [5] Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? [6] I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. [7] If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. [8] For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (**12:1-8**).

Matthew sets the tone for the head-on-collision between Jesus and the religious leaders in **Matthew 15:1-9** through the various conflicts between Him and the leaders of Israel. This text should not be separated from what precedes. Just a casual reading of the Gospel of Matthew reveals the condition of the hearts of the leaders. To arrive at a correct diagnosis of the words of Jesus in **Matthew 15:9**, one must analyze the Scriptures that disseminates God's attitude toward religion that consist in external regulations rather than one's personal relationship to God and to man. The teaching in **Matthew 15:1-9** is that not all the outward rituals in the world can compensate for a heart that is full of self-love, harshness, and ill-will toward other believers

CONCLUSION

John the Baptist begins his ministry with a strong rebuke of the religious leaders (**3:7-12**). Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the teachings of the religious leaders (Pharisees) (**5:20**) and ends His ministry with a scathing rebuke and condemnation to the leaders of Israel (**23:1-39**). Even though this author believes that Roy H. Lanier, the late Homer King (1892-1993),[64] Mark Bailey, and the late E. H. Miller (1909-1989) are/were wrong in their misapplication of **Matthew 15:1-9**, still one cannot apply this Scripture citation against them in its totality. Their attitude is not on par with the men whom Jesus condemned—a heart problem. Nevertheless, there is an aspect of this passage that is applicable. One cannot apply an application of this pericope (unit or section) to other Christians who cannot, in good conscious, adhere to their odd interpretations of so many Scriptures. These men, in essence, make void the commandments of God through their own fossilized traditions, which may be called the commandments of men.

The "commandments of men" that Jesus addressed had nothing to do with the issues that currently plague the Churches of Christ. Nevertheless, of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one has its own set of the "commandments of men", which in effect nullify God's commands in **Romans 14 & 15** and **1 Corinthians 8**. The Churches of Christ need to reexamine the principles of interpretation. I fear that because of the belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, which is true, Christians often bring a very wooden interpretation to it. But one's belief in the Bible as the Word of God does not allow individuals to ride roughshod over the consciences of other Christians. The one Scripture that might be applicable to these brethren, as mentioned above, is from the Book of Titus. Paul informs Titus that since God has put our lives together, there are certain things that Christians should do and should not do. Listen to Paul as he instructs Titus about a divisive spirit:

> Remind the people to respect the government and be law-abiding, always ready to lend a helping hand. No insults, no fights. God's people should be bighearted and courteous. It wasn't so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back. But when God, our kind and loving Savior God, stepped in, he saved us from all that. It was all his doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored

> our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this. I want you to put your foot down. Take a firm stand on these matters so that those who have put their trust in God will concentrate on the essentials that are good for everyone. Stay away from mindless, pointless quarreling over genealogies and fine print in the law code. That gets you nowhere. Warn a quarrelsome person once or twice, but then be done with him. It's obvious that such a person is out of line, rebellious against God. By persisting in divisiveness he cuts himself off (**Titus 3:1-10**).[65]

This instruction from Paul to Titus is the same instructions that Paul calls attention to in the very end of his epistle to the Romans (see **Romans 16:17**). This passage follows on the heel of his warning about forcing other believers into conformity to one's own conclusions—whether right or wrong in his opinions.[66] Christians must guard against a slavish imitation of any part of the past without regard to the conditions and circumstances, which prevailed at the time. One's belief of the past is the practice of a so-called worship service with five ordained rituals to be performed on Sunday morning in order for worship to be in spirit and in truth. The concept of a worship service with five ritualistic acts is totally lacking in both books (Titus and Romans). When one's ethical conduct is not in harmony with the teachings of Jesus, then one's worship of God is in useless. One must present his/her body as a living sacrifice to God. Paul writes to the Romans:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. [2] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

When one does not present his/her body as a living sacrifice, then one's worship of God is in vain. If one does not obey the Gospel, that is to say, if one does not bring his/her life into conformity to the Sermon on the Mount, then one's worship is abortive.

In concluding this essay, the following Scripture (**Matthew 12:1-8**) is cited again in order to reinforce what God is concerned about. Eugene Peterson captures the heart of this pericope as he translates:

> One Sabbath, Jesus was strolling with his disciples through a field of ripe grain. Hungry, the disciples were pulling off the heads of grain and munching on them. Some Pharisees reported them to Jesus: "Your disciples are breaking the Sabbath rules!" Jesus said, "Really? Didn't you ever read what David and his companions did when they were hungry, how they entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat? And didn't you ever read in God's Law that priests carrying out their Temple duties break Sabbath rules all the time and it's not held against them? "There is far more at stake here than religion. If you had any idea what this Scripture meant—'I prefer a flexible heart to an

inflexible ritual'—you wouldn't be nitpicking like this. The Son of Man is no lackey to the Sabbath; he's in charge"[67]

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[1] For an examination of oddities in pattern theology, see Dallas Burdette, "Oddities in Pattern Theology" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS, then under WORSHIP.

[2] Roy H. Lanier, "How Important Is Doctrine," in *The Spiritual Sword* 28, no. 1 (October 1996): 39.

[3] Roy H. Lanier, "Difficult Queries About Fellowship (Part 1)," in *The Restorer* 10, no. 9/10 (September/October 1990): 14-15.

[4] Ibid., 14.

[5] Cedric B. Johnson, *Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

[6] Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 45.

[7] For a detailed analysis of the religious leaders called hypocrites, see Dallas Burdette, "The Political Powers of the Pharisees and Their Oral Tradition [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001), located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under ELDERS. See also Dallas Burdette, " A Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 16 February 2001), located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under GOSPEL OF MATTHEW for a comprehensive study of the religious leaders and Jesus.

[8] Roy H. Lanier, "Difficult Queries About Fellowship," part 1, *The Restorer* 10, no. 9/10 (September/October 1990): 14-15.

[9] The Stone/Campbell Movement was born on the American frontier in the first half of the nineteenth century.

[10] Ibid., 15.

[11] See Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music: Psalm 150" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading PSALMS. This study, in

addition to illustrating that God is the motive behind instrumental music, exposes the fallacies in the arguments set forth to condemn something that God commanded.

[12] A detailed study of the subject of the philosophy of worship consisting of "five acts" is analyzed by this author on his website. See Dallas Burdette, "Sunday Morning Worship—Five Acts?" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading WORSHIP. See also "Congregational Worship and Division," Ibid.

[13] See Roy H. Lanier, "Difficult Queries About Fellowship," *The* Restorer, 15. For an examination of Romans 16:17 and 2 John 9-11, see Dallas Burdette, "Watch Out For Those Who Cause Division" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading ROMANS (57 CE). See also, Dallas Burdette, "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under SECOND JOHN.

[14] See "Homer L. King 1892-1983," *Old Paths Advocate* LV, no. 9 (September 1, 1983): 1-12 for a tribute to this great Christian man. See also Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under LORD'S SUPPER for a detailed explanation of this odd movement and the role that King played in this misguided movement. This author knew and heard Homer L. King preach. He sought to do the will of God, but he, like so many other godly men, never really understood what it was all about.

[15] See Homer A. King, *Old Paths Pulpit: A Book of 33 Sermons and Essays* (Missouri: Old Paths Advocate, 1945), 137, 140.

[16] Ibid., 140.

[17] Ibid., 135.

[18] Ibid., 133.

[19] Ibid., 140.

[20] Personal letter to Dallas Burdette (11 May 1990) from Mark Bailey in Burdette's Special Collection located at Southern Christian University Library, Montgomery, AL.

[21] See Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the First Century" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the LORD'S SUPPER.

[22] See Dallas Burdette, "How to Read the Word of God More Accurately" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under HERMENEUTICS.

[23] Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 4 (April 1965): 51.

[24] Ibid., 50.

[25] Ibid., 51.

[26] Leroy Garrett, "IT MEANS WHAT IT SAYS," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[27] See Dallas Burdette, "Identification of False Prophets in Matthew 24" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under GOSPEL OF MATTHEW. This essay details the hypocrisy of the religious leaders that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 15:1-9.

[28] There is a certain amount of repetition in this section, but sometimes it is necessary in order to reinforce the correct interpretation of the Matthean passage.

[29] For an example of this philosophy of one-cup being one of the commandments of God, see Bruce Roebuck, "Tearing Down the Walls," *Old Paths Advocate* 69, not 10 (October 1995): 5. He writes:

> To change or advocate changing the way this supper is observed is to deny the Word of God. According to the above verses it is to be observed with a loaf of unleavened bread to represent the Lord's body, one cup to represent the New Testament, and unfermented grape juice to represent the Lord's blood shed for the salvation of men. In the bygone days of yesteryear men sought to tear down this wall. They introduced individual communion cups to their own demise. Having left the pattern they split brethren and condemned themselves by adding to the Word of God.

[30] Ibid., where he writes that the use of Sunday school is a violation of God's Word :

> Another wall worthy of note is that of Sunday School classes. While on the surface this may appear to be an honorable idea, further study reveals it to be a departure from the word of God.

[31] The following quote is only given to illustrate the frustrations that individuals experience when others do not agree with their "pet" themes. See Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ," letter dated, September 25, 1996, *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 2, where Dutton bemoans the views of Buddy Bell, pulpit minister for the Landmark Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL:

> When I asked Buddy if he believed solos, choirs, and quartets were scriptural in worship, he did not even hesitate with his answer. He told me in no uncertain terms that he believed that the practice of using solos, choirs, and quartets was in his words, 'very scriptural.' In fact he went on to state that he had NO biblical problem with them. The funny thing is that he was amazed that I was so convinced that they were wrong.

Following this charge against Bell for his unwillingness to forsake his beliefs, Dutton withdrew from the Landmark Church of Christ and placed membership with the College Church of Christ, which is a very conservative, traditional Church of Christ. This church does use individual cups and provides classes for its Sunday school on Sunday morning.

[32] If one wishes to see the many oddities that exist within the Churches of Christ, then refer to the following, as cited earlier in this essay. The reference is listed again: see Dallas Burdette, "Oddities in Pattern Theology" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS, then under WORSHIP. One quickly discovers from this essay that the Churches of Christ have difficulty in determining the commandments of men versus the commandments of God.

[33] Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 172.

[34] For a detailed study of the Pharisees and their oral tradition, see Dallas Burdette, "The Political Power of the Pharisees and Their Oral Tradition" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 17 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under ELDERS. Also see Dallas Burdette, "Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 17 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under GOSPEL OF MATTHEW. This essay demonstrates that this conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders was an on going affair from the beginning of Matthew's Gospel to the end of his Gospel.

[35] See William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 607-612, for an excellent explanation of the traditions of the elders.

[36] Ibid., 612.

[37] *Transliteration* is taking the letters, not the meaning, but the letters of one language and converting them into equivalent letters in another language. On the other hand, *translation* means to take the meaning of a word from one language and put that meaning into another language.

[38] See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, The Anchor Bible 26 (New York: Doubleday, 1971), CXIII.

[39] Ibid. CXIII

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., CXVII.

[42] Dave Miller, "Changes in Worship," *Spiritual Sword* 28, no. 1 (October 1996), 25-28.

[43] One cannot help but wonder if Miller considers baptism a sixth act of worship?

[44] Ibid., 27.

[45] Ibid., 26.

[46] Ibid., 27

[47] The *Spiritual Sword* is published by the Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis, TN. This journal is probably one of the most radical of all publications put out by Churches of Christ. Just a perusal of the articles quickly reveals that the writers, as whole, do not concern themselves with context. The authors in this journal cite a lot of Scripture, but so do the Jehovah Witnesses. In the interpretation of passage, one should always remember CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT.

[48] See Hugo McCord, "Does Instrumental Music Matter?" *Spiritual Sword* 28, no. 1 (October 1996): 30; see also Roy H. Lanier, Jr., "How Important Is Doctrine?" Ibid., 39.

[49] David Hester is also author of *Among the Scholars* (Tuscumbia, AL: David Hester, 1994), which is similar in nature to Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996).

[50] For information on R.L. (Pat Kilpatrick), see Dallas Burdette, "Biographical Material on the Life of R.L. Kilpatrick," and "Kilpatrick's Concept of Leadership" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under ELDERS.

[51] See David W. Hester, "IS ENSIGN 'FAIR?'" *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (June 1, 1997): 2-3. For an examination of this essay, see Dallas Burdette, "Watch Out for Those Who Cause Division (16:17)" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 20 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under ROMANS (57 CE).

[52] See David W. Hester, "CELEBRATING DIVISION," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (June 15, 1997): 4.

[53] Jodie Boren, "The Melting Pot," *Seibles Road Church of Christ* (April 27, 1997): 3.

[54] *The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

[55] For an explanation of "Targums" and "LXX," see F. B. Huey, Jr. and Bruce Corley, *A Students dictionary for Biblical & Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983), 185, where they define the word *Targum*:

> **TARGUM.** A word that means literally "translation." Usually refers to translations ot the parts of the OT into—Aramaic, originating in the public reading of the OT in the synagogue, that involves a certain amount of interpretative comment or—paraphrase. EX. The Targum of Onkelos (the Pentateuch) and the Targum of Jonathan (the Prophets).

[56] See Ibid., 173, where they define LXX:

> **SEPTUAGINT**. From Latin *Septuaginta*, "seventy." Greek translation of the OT that (according to the Letter of Aristeas) was made by Jews of Alexandria, Egypt, around 250 B.C.: the word is frequently written as—LXX. Strictly speaking, the term should apply only to the Pentateuch, but the name came to be used of the entire Greek translation of the OT.

[57] Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Thornapple Commentaries, reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 223.

[58]William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary, 613.

[59] See Dallas Burdette, "Unity in Jesus" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under UNITY AND DIVERSITY. This essay explores the concept of imperfection in knowledge.

[60] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Daily Study Bible Series, 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 117.

[61] Ibid.

[62] For an in-depth study on worship, see Dallas Burdette, "Worship: An Analysis of the Various Greek Words" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 16 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

[63] For a detailed explanation of this conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, see Dallas Burdette, "Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 21 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

[64] For a brief history of the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-cup and Non-Sunday School Movement," [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 22 February 2001], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under LORD'S SUPPER.

[65] Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group) 1997.

[66] For a detailed analysis of this passage (**Romans 16:17**), see Dallas Burdette, "Watch Out for Those Who Cause Division" [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 22 February 2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under ROMANS.

[67] Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group) 1997.

The Narrow Gate

January 25, 1999

Thrust statement: The one who submits to the greater righteousness is on the narrow road.

Scripture reading: Matthew 7:13-14.

> *Narrow and Wide Gates*
> "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate
> and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and
> many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow
> the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

As a young preacher boy, I cited this Scripture to uphold my narrow, sectarian attitude. I called upon these verses (**13-14**) to entice others to join my party—the company that I erroneously identified as the "narrow gate." For one not to be in the band that I belonged to was equivalent to being in the all-embracing road to hell. For one not to be in my circle—one-cup and non-Sunday school—then, that person was on his or her way to underworld. Why? Well, they were on the "spacious" road. This Scripture is still relied upon by many factions within the Churches of Christ to try to get people in line with the traditions of a select few. This citation of Scripture is often brought up by many well-meaning Christians to browbeat those who do not adjust into conformity to their eccentric fellowship. If one does not adhere to certain doctrinal understandings of a distinctive "interpretive community," then, that person is not in the "narrow way," according to certain segments of the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement.

Many Christians still repeat this phrase to denounce those who do not concur with their critical views about individual communion cups, Bible study classes, instrumental music in the Sunday morning worship, solos, hand-clapping in the assembly, women translators, Bible colleges, and so on. Innumerable individuals conclude that every human being that strays from toeing the party line is on the "broad

road" that leads to death. Today, there are over two-dozen splinter groups that lay claim to the "narrow road." One assembly of believers is not willing to express fellowship with another association of unwavering saints. To one crowd, the limited way is their restricted reading of certain Scriptures. To another fellowship, the thin channel is their exposition of Holy Scripture. Therefore, this essay will analyze the "orthodox way" in the light of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. Just what does our Lord have reference to when he mentions the "narrow way"?

THE NARROW ROAD VERSUS THE BROAD ROAD

One must choose to follow the commandments of God or the commandments of men. One way is easy, the other way is hard. The boundaries are clearly distinguished. One gate leads to destruction, the other gate lead to eternal life. Revealed truths compel obedience to God's way. To enter the "narrow gate," one must leave "self" behind; on the other hand, to enter the "roomy way," there is no limit to the baggage—self-righteousness, pride, hatred, envy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, discord, and so on. The "narrow gate" is the very opposite of these works of the flesh.

The objective of our Lord in this "Sermon on the Mount" is to bring people to an understanding of their nature, their character, and their practice of the two great commandments—love God and love one another (**Matthew 22:34-40**). One must realize that kingdom behavior is set forth in the beatitudes (**Matthew 5:3-12**). This kind of conduct is the narrow road and the narrow gate that Jesus addresses in His Sermon—not individual cups, Sunday school, solos, handclapping, instrumental music, and so on. The realm of the New Jerusalem is a dominion of light. This kingdom consists of those who allow their good works to be seen by men in order that God may be praised (**Matthew 5:14**).

Jesus speaks of ethical behavior that is in harmony with the will of God as that which God desires in His children. It is an inward righteousness that God is delighted in, not external righteousness. Following the beatitudes, Jesus addresses the praiseworthy performance that is pleasing to the Father and the unworthy conduct that is not acceptable to the Father. He explains that the quality of one's actions that pleases God is practice that is in harmony with the intent of God's law:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:17-20**).

Paul also addresses kingdom conduct in his epistle to the Galatians. To begin with, he tells the Galatians that a certain course of action will prevent their entering the kingdom of heaven:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Galatians 5;19-21**).

These works of the flesh will prevent one from inheriting God's kingdom. This kind of behavior is not kingdom behavior. Rather, it is the "broad road" that leads to eternal damnation. This deed of achievement reminds one of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He calls for radical reformation in one's life style. Paul, too, is describing in these verses the actions that are illustrative of the "broad road." Following this catalogue of negative behavior, he then enumerates "good works" that are representative of the "narrow road":

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**Galatians 5:22-26**).

Again, Paul stresses the nature of the kingdom in **Romans 14:17-18**: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. The Kingdom of heaven's righteousness is not to be confused with the darkness of Satan's kingdom (the broad road). We are now, in the words of Paul, "set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:18**).

Beginning with **Matthew 5:21** and going through **Matthew 5:48**, one discovers that Jesus again sets forth the distinctive characteristics that are representative of the righteousness that is and is not pleasing to God. The "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (**Matthew 5:2**1) stands for of the "broad road," on the other hand, "But I tell you " (**Matthew 5:2**2) characterizes the "narrow road" that Jesus addresses toward the end of His Sermon (**Matthew 7:13-14**).

The "broad road" is composed of people who perform their "acts of righteousness" to be seen of men (**Matthew 6:1**); the "broad road" is about human beings who pray to be "seen by men" (**Matthew 6:5**); and the "broad road" consists of individuals who fast to "show men they are fasting" (**Matthew 6:16**). The "narrow road" embodies men and women who give to be seen by God, who pray to be seen by God, and who fast to be seen by God. The "narrow road" and "narrow gate" involves individuals who are bankrupt in spirit (**Matthew 5:3**); it includes people who mourn because of their sins (**Matthew 5:4**); it contains human beings who are meek as a result of their bankruptness and mourning (**Matthew 5:4**); it encompasses those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that is inward—a righteousness that glorifies God (**Matthew 5:6**); it embraces one who is merciful (**Matthew 5: 7**); and it encloses one who is pure in heart (**Matthew 5:8**).

This way had nothing to do with the many peripheral issues that divide so many Christians within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement. This "narrow way" had nothing to do with absolute perfection in knowledge; this "narrow way" had nothing to

do with the performance of "five-acts" of worship on Sunday morning. The believers in Rome, Corinth, and so on, did not possess flawlessness in their comprehension of God's written revelation; nevertheless, they were still in the "narrow way" as a result of living pure, holy lives. There were doctrinal differences within the early community of God, but, nevertheless, they were still exhorted to follow Jesus, so that with one mouth and heart they could glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (**Romans 15:5**). This is what the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate" is all about—holiness in one's life (**Matthew 5:3-20**).

In our Lord's prayer (**Matthew 5:9-14**), Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" . . . "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (**Matthew 5:12, 14**). This is a part of the "narrow road." As stated above, Jesus begins this Sermon by expounding upon the characteristics that must be manifest in the life of every follower of Christ. It is imperative that every man and woman be "poor in spirit" (**Matthew 5:3**), that is to say, he or she must not be self-righteous.

Following this Sermon, on another occasion, Jesus had the opportunity to illustrate this aspect of His Sermon on humility with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (**Luke 18:9-14**). In this parable, Jesus illustrates the sanctimonious spirit of the Pharisee. This holier-than-thou kind of spirit leads to destruction—it is the "broad way." One's attitude should be like the attitude that Paul expresses in his Galatian letter: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (**Galatians 6:1**).

In order to stress the true meaning of the "narrow road," it is necessary to exercise repetition in the retelling of some of the beatitudes. Once more, the second beatitude—"Blessed are those who mourn" (**Matthew 5:4)—**describes the feelings of an individual that is poverty-stricken in spirit. This person aches over his or her sins. And, as a result of his or her destitution, this brooding will display a make-up of unpretentiousness (**Matthew 5:5**). No one will pray, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'" (**Luke 18:11**)—this self-righteousness is the "broad road" that leads to destruction.

The person that is bankrupt, the person that is mourning, the person that is weak, will unremittingly long for goodness. This person will yearn for virtues that belong to God. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). This beatitude blesses not only the deed but also the dream that never comes true. Nevertheless, in spite of our failures, everyone is to strive toward faultlessness. Our Lord expresses it this way: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (**Matthew 5:48**). One must mirror God in all his or her actions.

Christians are the "salt" and "light" of the world (**Matthew 5:13-16**). The believer's morality must exceed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law: "For I tell you," says Jesus, "that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:20**). Remember that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees' righteousness lay in externals

(to be seen by men), not inward (to be seen by God). The righteousness of the religious leaders embodies the "broad way," not the "narrow way."

As stated above, Jesus now proceeds to show His disciples that His followers must put into practice the righteousness of God. He demonstrates this kind of righteousness by giving detailed instructions concerning murder (**Matthew 5:21-26**), adultery (**Matthew 5:27-30**), divorce (**Matthew 5:31-32**), oaths (**Matthew 5:33-37**), an eye for an eye (**Matthew 5:38-42**), love for one's enemies (**Matthew 5:43-48**), giving to the needy (**Matthew 5:1-4**), praying (**Matthew 5:5-15**), fasting (**Matthew 5:16-18**), laying up treasures (**Matthew 5:19-24**), worrying (**Matthew 5:25-34**), and judging others (**Matthew 7:1-6**). In this Sermon, Jesus approaches the believer's whole disposition toward others. He lays down the kind of ethical behavior that constitutes the course of action that is representative of the "narrow way"— performance that God is pleased with.

Jesus says, in effect, that good behavior is kingdom behavior; this is the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate." Jesus now comes to exhortation and to application. He warns that it is not praise, as such, from the lips of men that will enable men and women to enter the kingdom of heaven, but practice. This Sermon is functional; it is meant to be lived. It is something that everyone is to achieve and execute. Paul throughout his epistles stresses this kind of behavior. One only has to reflect upon the writings of Paul to the Ephesians (chapters 4 and 5) to capture the essence of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (**4:2**); Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (**4:3**); Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor (**4:25**);Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (**4:29**); Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (**4:32**); Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (**5:1-2**); But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (**5:3**); Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (**5:4**); For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (**5:5**).

CONCLUSION

The Christian message is not some ideological theory, but something that is to be lived. The "narrow road' and "narrow gate" has to do with one's everyday living—our relationship to God and to one another. It is works of the Spirit versus works of the flesh. Paul, no doubt, echoed the thoughts of our Lord Jesus when he expresses himself to the Galatians: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

By Dallas Burdette February 21, 1998

Thrust Statement: In the Judgment, God will look for living faith.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

The parable of the sheep and goats is difficult to interpret since Jesus did not interpret this for us. Since interpretation is a human discipline, not an activity of the Holy Spirit, then, I ask you to put up with me as I attempt to unfold its meaning, as I perceive it, for the Christian community. As you read this parable, What comes to your mind? Do you read this as a parable about ethical behavior? Do you read this parable as reflecting the "golden rule" enunciated by Jesus? You remember this rule, don't you? Matthew records it for us: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (**Matthew 7:12**). Do you read this parable as a call to social action concerning the poor? Just what does this parable say to you? Is this a parable about how one is put in a right relationship with God? Does one earn his or her salvation through works? Just what is this parable saying to you?

Surely, as one reads this story, one cannot help but reflect upon this parable as a description of Christian love and charity. This parable has inspired and challenged generations of Christians to care for the needy. Some believers have stressed this parable to the point of neglect of the preaching of the Gospel. Thus, the concern for poverty and social injustice is often referred to as the social gospel. But one must not confuse the gospel with concern for social needs of the people. It is true that every Christian is to be influenced for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the imprisoned, etc., but every Christian must also be thunderstruck about telling the story of redemption through Jesus Christ.

As we begin this survey of the sheep and the goats, one must never forget the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. Paul expresses it this way: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast" **(Ephesians 2:8-9**). On the other hand, one must not forget the next

verse. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**v.10**). In one's reflection upon good works and the proclamation of the good news about God's way of salvation through faith, one cannot help but recall the words of Jesus in His response to John's disciples about His being the Messiah or should they look for another.

> "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (**Matthew 11:4-5**).

Not only did Jesus perform deeds of kindness, but He also preached the gospel to the poor. Jesus not only healed sinners of their physical ailments, but He also went to sinners to proclaim God's way of justification for humanity. Some of the most scornful condemnation Jesus received had to do with his sociability toward sinners. Mark reports one such criticism:

> When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (**Mark 2:16-17**).

Luke, the beloved physician and companion of Paul, also writes about another incident in which the religious leaders complained: "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (**Luke 15:1-2**). Jesus did not apologize for this behavior, but rather, He defended His actions. In fact, Jesus, on this particular occasion, employed three parables—The Parable of the Lost Sheep, The Parable of the Lost Coin, and The Parable of the Lost Son—to gain the sympathy of the crowd. Once He gained their approval for certain action, He said, in effect, "that is what I am doing." He had come to seek the lost sheep just as the woman sought the lost coin, as the shepherd looked for his lost sheep, and as the father welcomed his returning son.

Another parable that has captured the hearts of men and women is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**Luke 18:9-17**). From this parable it is clear what Jesus values most in men and women. It is not a proud consciousness of his or her moral rectitude, but a deep sense of his or her own need in the presence of God—"God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (**Luke 18:13**). Jesus treats people with kindness and compassion when they come to Him. He does not pay them what they deserve. Toward the end of Jesus ministry, He left Galilee and entered into the territory of His enemies. Following an encounter with the Pharisees and a rich young ruler, Jesus told the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (**Matthew 20:1-16**). In this parable, the employer behaves with outstanding charity. No one receives less than his due, and most receive much more. In the same way, it is kindness and compassion, not mere justice that controls the actions of Jesus. Jesus forgives sins. On one occasion, while visiting in the home of a Pharisee (**Luke 7:36-50**), a woman came to Him, one described as a sinner, and washed His feet. In the course of the conversation, Jesus said to her: "Your sins are forgiven" (**v.48**).

Paul reproduces this ministry of Jesus in his writings. Jesus, in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, speaks of the "tax collector" as going down to his house "justified." It is this same thought that Paul picks up in his Roman letter: "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Again Paul says, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (**Romans 5:9**).

This brings us back again to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. If one is saved by God's grace, Does this do away with good works? The religious leaders, so it seems, were genuinely distressed at the teaching and conduct of Jesus; they feared that He was undermining the very foundation of morality. Paul also dealt with this same fear on the part of some believers. Paul poses the question: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (**Romans 3:31**). Paul did not reject the law, but he did reject the law as a means of salvation. As a result of this teaching, Paul was accused of encouraging wickedness by his so-called lawless statements about the law. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (**Romans 6:1**) appears to be their confused disapproval of Paul's theology. Paul was shocked at the attitude of many of his adversaries. He was stung at their accusations against him: "Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—'Let us do evil that good may result'?" (**Romans 3:8**).

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats illustrate graphically Jesus' insistence on good works. One cannot read this parable and not recall the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (**Matthew 7:21**). For an individual to maintain a right relationship with God, there is an obligation of good conduct on the part of man. This aspect of Jesus' teachings stands out prominently in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**). God's prophets were adamant in proclaiming that which pleases God is not words and ceremonies, but obedience to the will of God, especially in the requirements of mercy and justice in the treatment of others. Micah, who prophesied between 735 and 686 BC, went right to the heart of what it is that pleases God.

> With what shall I come before the LORD
> and bow down before the exalted God?
> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
> with calves a year old?
> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with ten thousand rivers of oil?
> Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
> He has showed you, O man, what is good.
> And what does the LORD require of you?
> To act justly and to love mercy (**Micah 6:6-8**).

Micah makes crystal clear what it is that makes a man acceptable or unacceptable to God. Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah, also calls attention to the unethical behavior of the nation of Israel: "No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil" (**Isaiah**

59:4). Following his castigation of them for their wickedness, God sounds a clarion call as to what He expects:

> Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
> and in striking each other with wicked fists.
> You cannot fast as you do today
> and expect your voice to be heard on high.
> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
> only a day for a man to humble himself?
> Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
> and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?
> Is that what you call a fast,
> a day acceptable to the LORD?
> "**Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen**:
> to **loose** the chains of injustice
> and **untie** the cords of the yoke,
> to **set** the oppressed free
> and **break** every yoke?
> **Is it not to share your food with the hungry**
> and **to provide the poor wanderer with shelter**—
> **when you see the naked, to clothe him**,
> and **not to turn away from your own flesh and blood**? (**Isaiah 58:4-7**).

This sounds very similar to what Jesus says in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (**Matthew 25:35-36**). From this parable, one soon discovers that the parable emphasizes two points: (1) Conduct, not merely faith, as the decisive factor in the judge's verdict, and (2) Christ draws near to us through our extending deeds of kindness to others. In this parable, Jesus forcefully demonstrates that our acceptance with God depends on the attitude we have taken to others in their need. One cannot ignore the ethical emphasis Jesus lays upon Christian conduct. As one reflects upon this parable, one cannot help but recall similar thoughts expressed by James, our Lord's brother.

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But Someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (**James 2:14-20**).

John, one of the three who constituted the inner circle of disciples, also captures the timeless truths of the principles set forth by Jesus in this Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. John writes:

> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his (**1 John 3:17-19**).

Let us never forget that true justification is that relationship with God made possible to us through what God has done for us in Christ. Paul expresses it this way: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). As a result of what God has accomplished for us through Jesus, then, His life is to flow into ours through compassion, mercy, and love. If this does not begin to happen, then, what has taken place in our lives is not really justification, but something else. The reality of justification is validated by one's manifestation of love: "faith by itself" writes James, "if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (**James 2:17**). The authenticity of justification is proved by love. Is this not what Paul says in the Galatian letter? "By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (**Galatians 5:5-6**). Love is the work of faith; it cannot be inoperative. Works cannot save one, but if there are no works present in one's life, then, there must be something not right with one's faith. Love is the work of faith, and when love is absent, then, this absence betrays the inadequacy of the faith. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he captures the effects of God's gift of salvation by describing the position of the believer:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

CONCLUSION

While this parable might stand alone, nevertheless, the dialogue without the context would resemble an unset jewel. From start to finish, this parable describes an apocalyptic judgment. In its original setting, Jesus renounces the religious leaders for their rejection of His disciples. This judgment scene is very similar to the judgment scene Jesus pictures in the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount in His denunciation of the religious leaders:

> Watch out for **false prophets**. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are **ferocious wolves**. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that

> does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (**Matthew 7:15-20**).

Following the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records the second major discourse (**chapter 10**) in which Jesus calls and sends out His disciples to evangelize the lost sheep of the house of Israel (**10:6**). He warned them:

> I am sending you out like **sheep** among **wolves**. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles (**10:16-18**).

He further warns them that "When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (**10:23**). In the concluding remarks of this second discourse, as reported by Matthew, Jesus again says,

> **He who receives you receives me**, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. [42] And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these **little ones** because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward (**10:40-42**).

An act toward His disciples counts as an act toward Him. This same concept is presented to Saul in his persecution of the disciples of Jesus: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (**Acts 9:4**). Just as Jesus accused Paul of persecuting Him, Jesus also accused the religious leaders of neglecting Him through neglecting His disciples: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (**Matthew 25:40**). In **25:40,** Jesus speaks of His disciples as "the least of these brothers of mine," but in **10:42**, He describes these same disciples as "little ones." Even though the Parable of the Sheep and Goats rebuked the religious leaders for their rejection of the His disciples, nevertheless, the principles are still applicable toward all God's people. What does this parable say to you? Does it affect the way you feel about God's children? What do you intend to do about your relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Preached: Grassy Church of Christ; Arab, Al; February 22, 1998

Baptized: Tara Am Kelly on February 22, 1998; born July 9th, 1983.

The Ritual of Fasting in the Old and New Testaments

Thrust Statement: **Fasting is always a mark of deep spiritual concern.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 6:16-18**

> 16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (**Matthew 6:16-18**).

As one reflects upon the subject of fasting in the Old and New Testaments, one quickly discovers that fasting is a justifiable reaction to hazards, to hardships, to sadness, to mourning, or to confession of sin. Thus, many Christians resort to private fasting in the time of some physical or spiritual need in their own world of inadequacy. In order to shed light upon the practice of fasting in the Old and New Testaments, this essay will examine various texts to help determine the motives behind the numerous cases of fasting found in both Testaments.

FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb, xWm ("to fast"), and the Hebrew noun, som ("a fast"), implies total abstinence from all food for a certain period. Also associated with these two words is another phrase, u!nn> n#p#v ("to afflict the soul"), which also conveys the idea of fasting. This latter phrase is found in **Leviticus 16:29**, an expression associated with the Day of Atonement. Fasting in the Old Testament expresses grief and penitence. For example, the people of Jabesh Gilead, upon hearing of Saul's mistreatment by the Philistines, took the bodies of Saul and his sons from

Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned their bodies. Following their burial, the Scriptures inform its readers that the people fasted for seven days (**1 Samuel 31:11-13**). An example of penitence associated with fasting is found in **1 Samuel 7:6**: "When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, 'We have sinned against the LORD.' And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah" (NIV).

Prior to the Babylonian captivity, Isaiah (839 BCE), rebukes the children of Israel for thinking that fasting would automatically gain a hearing from God (**Isaiah 58:3-4**). Immediately, the prophet calls attention to right conduct. If one does not have respectable behavior, then fasting is in vain (**58:5-12**). Fasting, in and of itself, is desirable under certain circumstances, but, on the other hand, one's life must exhibit the ethical character that pleases God and helps humanity. God speaks through Isaiah: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and to break every yoke: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood (**58:6-7**).

As stated above, fasting is acceptable, but good behavior must precede fasting in order for this act of devotion to be acceptable to God (see also **Amos 5:21-24**). Following the Babylonian captivity, Ezra, a priest and teacher of the Law of God, assembles the people willing to go back to Jerusalem by the canal that flows toward Ahava. Whereupon he says, "I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions" (**Ezra 8:21**). One can find a number of examples in the Old Testament in which fasting was directed toward God to secure His guidance and help (see **Exodus 34:28**; **Deuteronomy 9:9**; **2 Samuel 12:16-23**; **2 Chronicles 20:3-4**).

FASTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The usual Greek words in the New Testament for fasting are the verb nhsteuw ("to fast, to go without food") and the noun nhsteia ("a fasting, a fast"). Fasting had become a common practice among the Jews and was continued among the Christians. The Jews fasted twice a week—Monday and Thursday—as a part of their religious devotion (see also **Luke 18:12**). Yet there were others like Anna who fasted often (**Luke 2:37**). The only occasion of Jesus fasting is in His temptation in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-4**). Jesus rebukes the practice of fasting when it is carried out simply as an outward manifestation of parade and not as inward act of devotion to God (**6:16-18**). The context of **Matthew 6:16-18** appears to assume that His disciples would find occasions that would call forth a time of abstinence from food in order to put themselves into a spiritual frame of mind to seek God's direction.

One such example of fasting is in the church at Antioch. Luke informs Theophilus (**Acts 1:1**) that while the church was engaged in "ministering" and "fasting" (**13:2**), the Holy Spirit says, "'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' [3] So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (**13:2-3**). This combination was common among the Jews, but the New Testament seldom combines these two acts of religious

zeal. There are only four instances in the New Testament in which the two acts of devotion occur together. Two of the occurrences are found in connection with Anna (**Luke 2:37**) and Saul's conversion (**Acts 9:9-12**).

Fasting is not an essential ingredient for prayer, even though it is joined to prayer. Prayer is commanded in the New Testament, but fasting is not commanded. Just a perusal of the Book of Acts reveals the absence of fasting in many prayers. For instance, Luke records a prayer meeting following the release of Peter and John from prison (**4:23-31**). Yet, the absence of fasting is conspicuously not present. Another example is the selecting of seven deacons to carry on the "daily distribution of food" to Grecian Jews (**6:1**) in which the apostles says, "We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (**6:3-4**). Again, fasting is not included. There is no record of fasting in the appointment of Matthias as an apostle (**1:24-26**).

Fasting is noticeably missing from the New Testament Epistles. Even though the noun form is found in **2 Corinthians 6:5** and **11:27**, one detects that in neither context is the noun used in the sense of a religious fast. One can draw the conclusion that fasting was not extremely major during the apostolic period. Following the apostolic era, one discovers that fasting gained a foothold in the practices of the church. The church eventually mandated the practice of fasting two days a week—changing the days from Mondays and Thursdays to Wednesdays and Fridays. Martin Luther (1483—1547) did not object to fasting, but he did protest the binding of this act of religious observance as a necessary duty; he also raised objections to the fixing of certain days as compulsory for its performance. Excessive emphasis upon fasting is, perhaps, the reason the word *fasting* is added to the following Scriptures: **Matthew 17:21**; **Mark 9:29**; and **Acts 10:30**. Both liberal and conservative scholars agree that since Tischendorf (1815-1874) that the word *fasting* is textual additions to the original Greek text, which clearly indicates the church's growing interest in the practice of fasting after the apostolic period.

CONCLUSION

An in-depth study of fasting in the Old Testament reveals that individuals resorted to fasting in order to avert calamity or to elicit God's compassion. The prophets also reveal that fasting without true meekness and contrition is worthless in God's sight. In the New Testament, one learns that the absence of Jesus from His disciples would lead one to believe that in the times of misfortune and misery, one would fast (see **Matthew 9:14-15**). Thus, one can conclude that fasting is a legitimate response to hazards, to hardships, to sadness, to mourning, or to confession of sin. These emotions may be demonstrated by private fasting. Having said this, nevertheless, fasting does not appear to be required of Christians. It is a voluntary act on the part of every believer when he/she realizes his/her inadequacy.

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